

SUPERBOWL 50



CAM NEWTON
& THE PANTHERS
LOOK TO SILENCE
THE HATERS ONCE
AND FOR ALL

BY TIM KEOWN



THE ULTIMATE
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THE PARTY THAT
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76

Peyton Manning, 39, looks to claim his second ring—this time as the oldest QB to play in the Super Bowl.

SUPER BOWL 50

35 SUPER BOWL 50

Gluttonous maximus: celebrating 50 years of America's favorite (unofficial) holiday.

36 ALL THAT GLITTERS ...

The NFL rings in Super Bowl's big 5-0 with really, really ridiculously gaudy things. BY BRYAN CURTIS

42 WHEN WHITNEY HIT THE HIGH NOTE

The "Star-Spangled Banner" that captivated a nation—and still does. BY DANYEL SMITH

54 GONE IN 30 SECONDS

From Bud Bowl to GoDaddy, we add up the ads.

56 BLADES OF GLORY

Can the Super Bowl grass withstand the weight of the big game? BY TOMMY TOMLINSON

64 JOEY FATONE, MISS FEBRUARY 1999 AND ONE EPIC CHOCOLATE FOUNTAIN

The toughest ticket in town at SB XXXVIII? Hint: It wasn't for the game. BY DAVID FLEMING

72 SUPER BOWL CONFIDENTIAL

NFL players spill the beans on all things Super Bowl. Anonymously, of course.

74 LORDS OF THE RINGS

Will A-Rodge dominate the next decade of Super Bowls? Our *SportsCenter* anchors debate.

76 SUPER BOWL 50 PREVIEW: THE JOY OF CAM NEWTON

As the Panthers battle the Broncos, Newton looks to prove that great football can still be fun. Plus, our big game breakdown. BY TIM KEOWN

FORWARD

11 WATCH THE THRONE Will Stephen Curry's rise lead to the dethroning of LeBron James?

Two games tell the story. BY KEVIN ARNOVITZ

22 ZOOM Eddie George, former Pro Bowl running back, takes on *Chicago*—the musical, that is.

24 ¿ESTÁS LISTO PARA EL FÚTBOL AMERICANO? Mexico has gone gonzo for the gridiron. We visit the scene of its annual collegiate football border war. REPORTING BY CARLOS NAVA

COLUMNS

8 THE TICKET

A new study reveals the hidden depths of the NFL's coaching diversity crisis. BY MINA KIMES



Game-Time Call

With seven weeks to go before the Super Bowl and 12 playoff teams still in the running, what's a magazine to do for its Super Bowl 50 cover? Well, if you have creative director Chin Wang under center, you prepare to call an audible. Ten commissioned illustrators, one photo shoot with Patriots receiver Julian Edelman and dozens of art options later, we had our champion. But as you can see, the games got interesting.

Clockwise from top left: Julian Edelman, photographed by Peter Hapak; ring illustration by Kendrick Kidd; superhuman Cardinals illustration by Eddie Guy; Peyton Manning as Mean Joe Greene, illustration by C.J. Burton; 3-D type illustration by Sean Freeman; Larry Fitzgerald illustration by Tavis Coburn.

Contributing photographer Shaughn Crawford on fútbol Americano



"My shooting partner, John DuBois (near left), and I live for the opportunity to photograph gritty documentary projects, so we were thrilled when we got the call to shoot this story in Tijuana. We didn't know what to expect but were pleasantly surprised when we arrived at a state-of-the-art football facility. We were also unprepared for Mexico's passion for fútbol Americano. Between us and our assistant, we knew enough Spanish to ask basic questions, but it was essentially a lot of Spanglish. Our high school Spanish teachers would be so disappointed." MORE ON PAGE 24

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Contributing writer Bryan Curtis on the branding of Super Bowl 50



"I was standing in the rain in San Francisco when the first Super Bowl 50 golden statue—featuring photos of every Super Bowl ring—was unveiled on Dec. 19. The ink on my notebook started to run; I jumped into the back of an 18-wheeler to keep from getting drenched. As I sat there, I thought, 'We are in the age of CTE and national domestic violence conversations, and here the league is presenting us with—and exhorting us to co-promote—what looked like a giant piece of jewelry.' But that oddly grandiose affect is typical of the modern NFL, from the Super Bowl hype to Stan Kroenke's hairdo—and it's also what got me interested in writing this story." MORE ON PAGE 36

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Senior writer David Fleming on the best Super Bowl party ever



"Not counting Pauly Shore, Paris Hilton's two main accessories at the Playboy Super Bowl party in Houston were a pair of pink silk stilettos and a flip phone the size of a sub sandwich. One of the unique challenges of re-creating this social event from 12 years ago—besides learning everything there is to know about the art of body painting—is that it was just before cellphone cameras and social media created a permanent electronic record of our every fatuous breath. Sure, it made reporting this piece a bit more challenging, but trust me, it also made for one hell of a party—probably the last of its kind, way back in the good old days ... of 2004." MORE ON PAGE 64

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ESPN national recruiting director Tom Luginbill makes his picks for the early enrollees to watch in 2016.

Jacob Eason

QUARTERBACK, GEORGIA

UVa transfer Greyson Lambert had a solid but unspectacular junior season in his first year with the Dawgs (67.6 QBR, 12 TDs, 2 INTs). So Eason's 6-foot-6, 217-pound frame and howitzer arm (43 TD passes as a senior at Lake Stevens High in Washington) could lead to a QB coup d'état. It helps that 14 starters will return—including Heisman hopeful (and hopefully healthy) RB Nick Chubb.

Trayveon Williams

RUNNING BACK, TEXAS A&M

The cupboard is pretty bare in College Station, where former blue-chip QBs Kyler Murray and Kyle Allen transferred out a week apart in December. The best antidote? A steady run game. Williams (5-9, 182) was an elusive back at C.E. King High in Houston; he'll get his shot on running downs—and should, along with Oklahoma transfer Keith Ford, help fill the hole left by last year's leading rusher, Tra Carson (1,165 yards).

Freddie Swain

WIDE RECEIVER, FLORIDA

Swain might not be the fastest of the loaded 2016 class of receivers, but he is a sorely needed weapon for a Florida team hurting for offensive playmakers. The 6-foot, 185-pound target has suction cups for fingers and natural playmaking instincts (2,070 career receiving yards and 19 TDs at North Marion High in Citra, Florida). He'll give the Gators a castmate to draw attention from sophomore Antonio Callaway.

Isaac Nauta

TIGHT END, GEORGIA

Eason won't be the Dawgs' only early enrollee to watch—he'll be throwing to Nauta, perhaps the most college-ready tight end prospect we've seen in the past 10 recruiting cycles. A more athletic Nick O'Leary (formerly of Florida State, now with the Bills), the 6-4, 237-pound product from IMG Academy in Bradenton, Florida, will serve as a terrific complement to emerging junior TE Jeb Blazevich.

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BY
MINA
KIMES



The Broken Ladder A new study reveals the hidden depths of the NFL's coaching diversity crisis, which the Rooney Rule can't begin to fix.



With the hiring of former Bengals offensive coordinator Hue Jackson, the Browns ensured that there will be at least six nonwhite head coaches in the NFL next season. That's up from two in 2002, after which owners implemented the Rooney Rule, requiring teams to interview minority candidates. The policy is widely praised as a triumph of leadership; some even argue that it's no longer needed and that the league has solved its diversity problem.

In truth, the problem still exists—and it might be worse than previously understood. According to new research from professors at Georgetown, George Washington, Emory and Iowa State University, white assistant coaches in the NFL are more than twice as likely to be promoted to coordinator as their black counterparts, regardless of their performance, experience or coaching background. One of the study's co-authors, Christopher I. Rider, says he was surprised by the magnitude of the “white coach effect” among aspiring coordinators, who aren't subject to the Rooney Rule. “Just focusing at the top is unlikely to effect much change,” says Rider, an assistant professor at Georgetown.

Rider and his co-authors tracked the careers of more than 1,200 NFL coaches between 1985 and 2012 to see whether they could explain why white coaches—about 72 percent of the pool—rose more frequently. One by one, they ticked through possibilities: team or individual unit performance, age and degree, among other inputs.

They also considered which positions the men coached when they entered the league, perhaps the most common justification for the lack of black coaches. According to their research, quarterbacks coaches are especially likely to become head coaches. And because white players are more likely to play quarterback (a recent study found that black high school quarterbacks are 39 percent more likely to be asked to switch positions in college), they are also more likely to coach the position, and then possibly become coordinators, and so forth. They accrue privilege from the moment they step foot onto a field.

By controlling for this factor, the researchers drilled down to a simple question: If you take white and black coaches of the same position, are they equally likely to advance?

The answer, according to the data, is no. The white coach is 114 percent more likely to become a coordinator. “Black coaches are less likely to be promoted than white ones, independent of their first position, their current position, their employer, their prior

experience, their education and their age,” the authors wrote.

And so we're left with a simple explanation: discrimination. Rider and his team estimated that it takes nine years before a white coach has a greater than 50 percent chance of becoming coordinator, compared with 14 years for a nonwhite coach. The professors used back-of-the-envelope math to approximate that, over a 20-year career, a white coach is likely to earn over \$20 million more than his nonwhite counterpart. Remarkably, the white coach effect hasn't declined over the years.

Rider says that white candidates interviewing for head-coaching gigs have only a 13 percent edge, a statistically insignificant advantage that has not changed much since the implementation of the Rooney Rule. One possible explanation, he says, is that more people—executives, owners, etc.—are involved in picking head coaches than lower-level ones. Networking plays a bigger role. “This league is about relationships,” says Herm Edwards, who was hired as head coach of the Jets in 2001 after working for the Buccaneers under Tony Dungy. “A lot of guys who are minority coaches that come in the league, after a while they get discouraged. They realize, ‘I'm going to be a position coach.’ ... There's a cycle, and it hasn't been broken.”

Bias—especially systemic bias, the sort of bias that many refuse to acknowledge until it materializes in the form of hard data—won't be solved with a new rule or committee. But such efforts at least keep the issue in focus. If teams really want more diversity at the top, they must acknowledge its absence at the bottom, working below the surface to promote coaches of color. There were nine nonwhite coordinators on defense this season, but with Jackson ascending, there are just two leading offenses, and countless coaches below them battling for a fair shot.

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Watch the Throne

Will Stephen Curry's rise lead to the fall of LeBron James?

BY KEVIN ARNOVITZ
A TRUEHOOP COLLABORATION



OAKLAND, CALIF. — DEC. 25, 2015

He has marinated in a Finals loss for 193 days, and now LeBron James flies west from Cleveland on Christmas Eve to revisit the concrete bowl on the San Leandro Bay that's home to everyone's new favorite darlings, the Golden State Warriors. It's the first of two meetings in a month against Stephen Curry, his improbable rival who, in less than a year, has laid claim to this league as his own. ¶ Soon after he arrives at the San Francisco hotel Thursday, James tells Cavaliers assistant Phil Handy that if the Oracle Arena court is available on Christmas morning, he'd like to get a

Curry's Warriors are young and possibly dynastic. James' Cavaliers? Just trying to keep pace.



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He's 31. He's played 44,000 minutes. If it's not the end for LeBron, it's at least the end's beginning.

sweat in during the hours before the 2 p.m. tip. Early games can test a player's tempo, and the opportunity to get some shots up, work on his handle, see a couple of touches in the post would soothe his rhythm when the ball goes up.

"He knows his body," Handy says.

James doesn't typically work out pregame, but here he is at 11:15 a.m., wearing knee-length gray sweatpants, the NBA's cute-ugly Christmas socks and a black CLEVELAND BASKETBALL T-shirt with long sleeves that cling to his sculpted triceps like cellophane wrap. He wrestles with Handy on the left block, pivots baseline, pivots again, then goes up and under.

By now he has worked up a sweat, and he yells over to the far sideline, "Bring some water." James isn't officious; he doesn't treat these guys like valets. There's almost a collaborative feel to the session, even as he's enveloped in the full bass of his wireless Beats Solo2s. Handy collects the ball, then instructs James on the next sequence of choreography. James nods, then asks for clarification.

"Left twice, then right three times, and jab first?"

"That's right."

A nation of basketball fans from Boston to Los Angeles has begun filling arenas 90 minutes before games to witness Stephen Curry's warm-up routine, but James has the place to himself. It's an empty, cold space this early, and James blows into his open fists.

"Down first or back?" LeBron asks.

"One stab, one hard step back," Handy tells him.

James goes to work, concluding each rep with that patented little right-toe kick. When he's in a groove, lyrics flow freely from his mouth. When he misses badly, it's "God---- it!" An off-target free throw draws "Ah, you b----!" Between sets, he consults with Handy on mechanics, then moves to the next spot.

LeBron is the new age superstar, a product of self-determination who doesn't just manage a personal brand but leverages it. That salary he earns from Cavaliers Operating Company LLC? Pocket change. His recent lifetime deal with Nike will feather his nest until his dying breath. A king's annuity. He has parked himself at the table for the upcoming collective bargaining agreement negotiations. He won't just earn a

paycheck; he'll dictate the thickness and pattern of the checkbook.

But influence is a different currency, and down the hall Curry has started to amass his own fortune. There's the championship ring, at LeBron's expense. He's now the most prolific seller of player jerseys—also at LeBron's expense. On Christmas morning, mere hours before tip-off, the league announced the first All-Star ballot returns, and James had half as many votes as the man he succeeded in the spotlight, Kobe Bryant, and 150,000 fewer than Steph.

Fans are fickle. They embrace novelty and nostalgia, shiny new objects and esteemed bronzed ones. But LeBron is neither new nor old, neither luminary nor upstart. He's the constant on a landscape that's shifting beneath him.

"Being the most influential player in the game, for him, is a challenge," says Cavs forward James Jones, whom LeBron calls his favorite player of all time. "That's his goal. When you think about basketball from here on out, who was that one transcendent guy who you couldn't replicate? When you have a LeBron James, a 6-8, 265-pound point-forward scorer, there aren't very many of them. The game has to change, to find something else."

What the game has found is Curry. And he, in turn, has expanded the base of NBA fans. Just as LeBron pushed the league to reimagine how size, speed, vision, finesse and intuition could be packaged in a single player, Curry has redefined what constitutes a high-percentage shot—and the people love it. They love that he looks like their brother's college roommate, love that every Warriors postseason tilt is bring-your-daughter-to-work day.

LeBron's appeal isn't relatable because LeBron is not like you. His hulking body emerges from the training room an hour before the game, ankles taped, abs ripped, a tangle of sinewy muscle looking for a mountain to climb. He settles in at his locker, grabs the large Beats Pill speaker and pumps Rich the Kid into the room. There's nowhere to hide from LeBron.

"NO, WE HAVE no traditions," James says of his young family at Yuletide. "If I can get a home game on Christmas, then we'll have a tradition."

Playing in a visiting building on Christmas Day is being twice cursed for an NBA star. It's an assignment away from family, but it's also a cruel reminder that your previous season concluded with a loss. So here's LeBron, spending the

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— MICHELLE BEADLE



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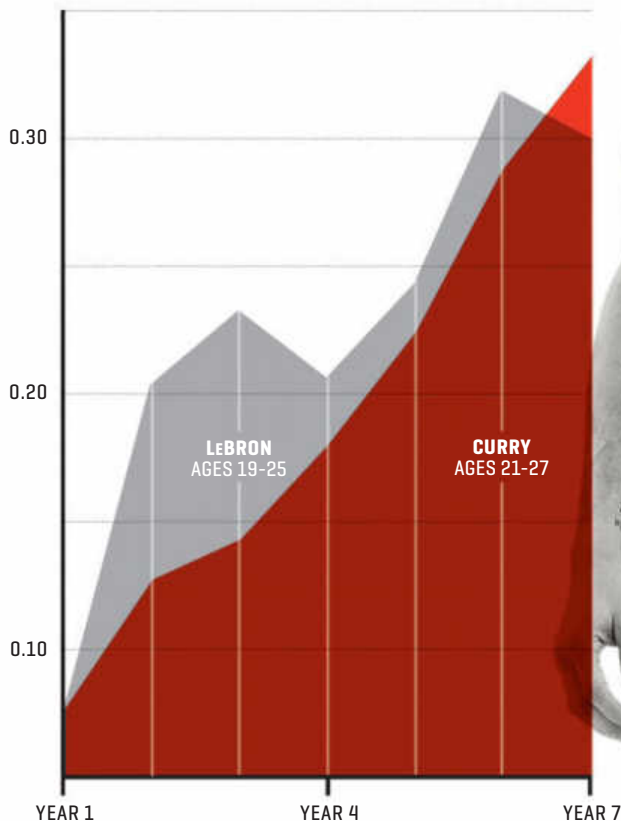
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TOP 3-POINT ATTEMPTS PER GAME IN NBA HISTORY

Season	Player	3PT%
2015-16	STEPHEN CURRY	10.7 44.9%
2003-04	BARON DAVIS	8.7 32.1%
1995-96	GEORGE McCLOUD	8.6 37.9%
1990-91	MICHAEL ADAMS	8.5 29.6%
2005-06	RAY ALLEN	8.4 41.2%

Clockwise from left: McCloud, Davis, Allen, Adams

ALL STATS THROUGH JAN. 21.

holiday on a business trip in StephWorld.

"We don't talk, but we have a lot of respect for one another," LeBron says of him and Curry. "I think he's special. He's very special. We all know that."

The tribute is neither grudging nor demonstrative. It's the regard you have for a talented colleague at work you never think to invite out for a drink. LeBron knows the business, so he must know that Steph is it, the comer in a league that celebrates—no, relies on—star power.

There's no time for those considerations now, though, because Kevin Love is in trouble. He's under the basket with possession of the ball, sandwiched between two of the league's best defenders, center Andrew Bogut and forward Draymond Green. LeBron hears the alarm. He zips down an open lane of the hardwood to

collect the ball for what could've been an easy bucket in a game with few. Love never shuttles a pass to LeBron and gets stuffed by the Warriors hoagie. LeBron takes issue, but Love already knows he flubbed the play. The two slap hands as timeout is called.

Last season LeBron was a bear in the Cavs' locker room, quick to tag teammates as soft and confront adversity with antagonism. Those who take note of such things say LeBron's turn to

positive leadership this season has been apparent. So when he gets on Tristan Thompson after a botched set that drew Green rather than the less mobile Festus Ezeli for LeBron, it's a clinic, not a scolding. A few minutes later, LeBron draws Steph.

The game becomes still. LeBron holds the ball and surveys the scene over Steph's outstretched arms. It's two samurai standing with their swords drawn, both fully aware that whoever moves first forfeits the advantage. LeBron takes two jab steps in quick succession, one at 10 o'clock, the next at 2 o'clock, but Steph doesn't yield. With the shot clock set to expire, LeBron takes a single dribble and steps back for a 3-pointer that scrapes the roof but doesn't fall.

As of this moment, since the start of the 2015 Finals, LeBron is 0-for-9 when guarded one-on-one by Steph.



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“WE DON’T TALK, BUT HE’S VERY SPECIAL. WE ALL KNOW THAT.”

LEBRON ON CURRY

“OBVIOUSLY WHEN YOU step on the court, you start to relive some of those moments, but I haven’t reflected much at all,” LeBron says. “It’s a totally different stage.”

LeBron is right: The Christmas Day game produces a crescendo in the fourth quarter but never reaches full climax. Still, for a few minutes down the stretch of a ragged but reasonably close game, LeBron’s mind and body wrest control of the action. This time, Steph can’t possibly contend with the brute force that is LeBron rolling downhill to his left. Nor can Klay Thompson shake him off a curl, as LeBron shadows him to the basket, swatting away the remains of Thompson’s drive at the rim.

Physicality still matters in the NBA, the way James controls his body, asserts his body, wields it against all challengers. A superstar throws his weight around the court and doesn’t worry about casualties, which is how we end up with another uncontested slam by LeBron on the other end. Skill plus strength, intuition plus impulse. The Warriors might feature a collective roster of versatility, *but don’t you forget I was brandishing that versatility before the first splash.*

“You can get into the era of analytics, you can get into the era of statistics, you can get into the era of small ball, you can look at a lot of different things, but one thing you can’t ever replace is the type of player you can put in any system and have those players thrive—and [LeBron] embodies the versatility,” Jones says. “That’s what makes him unique—no slight to any other player. That’s what sets him apart. I think it’s hard for the casual fan to appreciate that. They might not see the nuance.”

LEBRON INTERLACES HIS thick fingers and presses both palms into the crown of his head. With just

1:32 remaining, he has just missed two free throws that would’ve brought the Cavs to within two. There’s no “Ah, you b----,” no histrionics. Just a long stare into middle distance, with almost a resigned smile.

“I had a couple of plays I wish I could get back,” he tells a confidant in the locker room, which seems notably unbothered by yet another loss to Golden State. The Cavs didn’t drop the game because the Warriors were a younger, more innovative team. They lost because they couldn’t hit a shot.

“I didn’t put too much into it,” James says. “I told the guys on the bench, ‘Don’t put too much pressure into this one game.’”

CLEVELAND — JAN. 18, 2016

ABOUT THREE WEEKS after his unpleasant Christmas stay in the Bay, James pulls his mammoth SUV into the garage at Quicken Loans Arena, where he’ll play host to Curry. He alights from the tank with no hat, no Beats, no cultural signals. Just an elegant midnight blue topcoat, matching slacks and a violet scarf that stretches his 6-foot-8 frame even more.

As LeBron navigates the narrow hallway toward the Cavs’ inner sanctum, a gaggle of high school players from Harvest Prep and St. John Central is headed in the other direction. The boys, naturally, go berserk. They’re 150 miles from home and just played on a polished NBA court, but this chance encounter with Ohio’s most immortal hero will be the highlight recounted on the long bus ride home in the snow. LeBron gives a half-smile and politely greets them, but he’s all game face and long strides.

Two hours later, he starts and ends the first quarter the same way: with a rampage to the rim. In between, it’s 11 minutes of hell. His successor

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across the floor exceeds LeBron's power with silkiness and 16 points. Such is the pro game in 2016, and James can't win for losing. The two stars tangle as LeBron lays out a screen on Steph to free backup point guard Matthew Dellavedova on the right wing. There's a collision. Curry is grabby, but he's no match for the force of LeBron's weight. LeBron's mammoth hands press Steph's shoulders, and Steph immediately finds himself on his ass.

"I set a screen," James says of the offensive-foul call. "He held me right in front of the official. It's the same thing as when you're a kid in class. It's always the second guy who gets caught. I didn't tell the joke, but I laughed. I got caught. That's what happened."

In the second quarter on the playground, Curry steals James' lunch money, poking the ball away in the post. LeBron's face is something between exasperation and resignation. Steph picked him blind, sneaked up on him. This is LeBron's current station vis-à-vis Curry, the classmate who isn't the initiator of the disruption but the accessory to it. Not so long ago, LeBron *was* the disrupter, in the parlance of the startup world. Now it's Curry who is the upstart, and it's his night to quiet the hostile crowd. By the time the Warriors' lead reaches 37, LeBron is watching the carnage from the bench.

LEBRON ARRIVED EARLY to fame, a high school basketball heartthrob whose exploits were broadcast to the world. A few years later, Curry settled in at a marginal Division I program, a preppy campus near home where some scouts maintained that his slight frame was ill-equipped for the rigors of the NBA.

LeBron's first-act conflict was one of the great public relations failures of his generation. The damage from *The Decision* demanded a full-scale rehabilitation of his persona. The adversity encountered by Curry early in his career merely required the full-scale rehabilitation of his ankles. What's the greatest failure of Curry's public life?

N/A.

The halo shines brightly over Steph. It's a devout, almost precious existence. His wife's YouTube channel features a video of Ayesha serving him a breakfast soufflé and cajoling him into fixing breakfast for her on Mother's Day. Meanwhile, LeBron's Starz series *Survivor's Remorse* portrays an NBA star who smokes a little weed and engages in off-color conversations that might offend certain sensibilities. The contrast is profound, but each is an authentic expression of its world.



"Your background definitely always influences who you are, especially at that level, because part of getting to that level is staying true to yourself and who you are," says Green, a Curry teammate but a James admirer. "When you reach a certain level of stardom, the fun part is staying true to yourself. I think both of those guys have done that in a different way, though."

It's not that LeBron's public face isn't meticulously constructed, but he's never clung to purity as a personal virtue. Truth is, he's never really known innocence. Steph was born into basketball royalty. He practiced his shot the way other prodigies pursue the piano. LeBron grew up hard, and his support system was anything but nuclear. Setbacks and missteps were priced into his ascension.

So even on a night when he fell down by 43 points—the largest deficit of his 12-year career—LeBron sounds grateful for the opportunity. Smiling through the absurdity, he scoffs at the notion that being on the receiving end of such abuse should make him miserable, that it's more than just a bad day at the office.

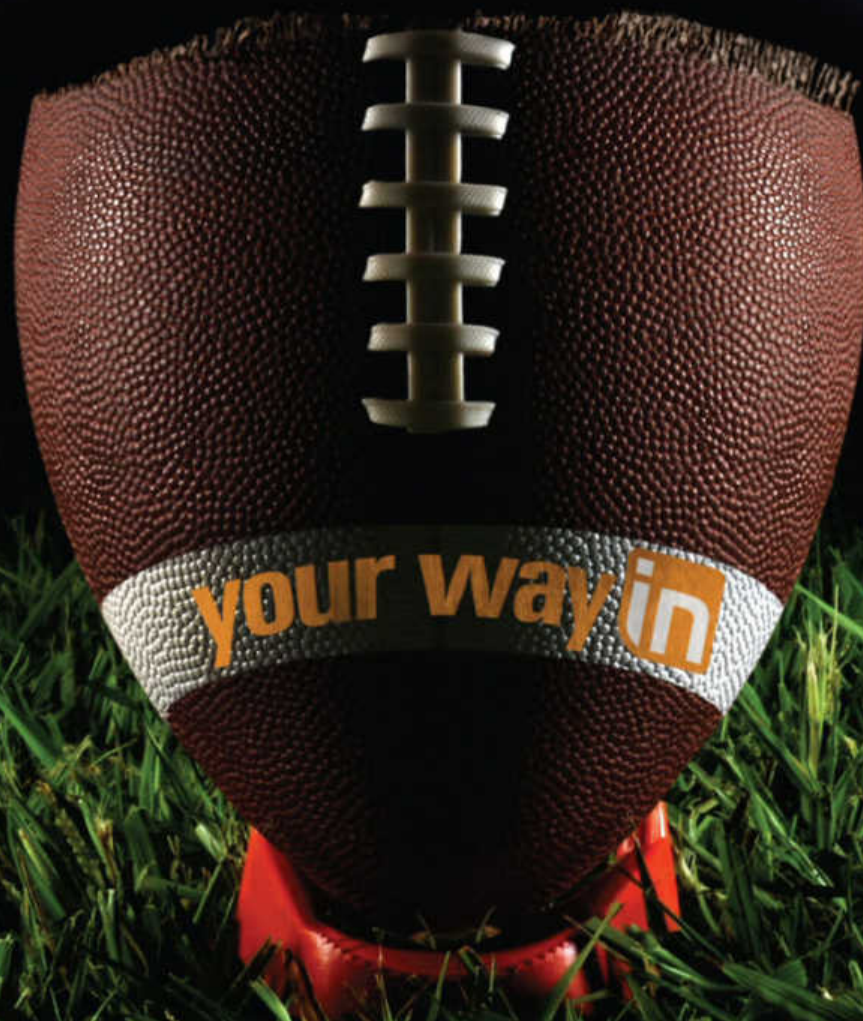
"It's not miserable. It's just not the end of the world—it's still a basketball game," he says. "I'm fortunate I've never been in an office. For me, it's never as bad and it's never as good as it may seem when you're going through it."

LeBron, once again, is on offense.

It's a struggle to imagine that this picture of strength also harbors human frailty, and if it's hard for us, imagine what it must be like for him. Over the course of any career, youthful exuberance mellows and talent grows into itself. Who knows exactly when that happened for LeBron. Forty-eight points in the double-overtime win over Detroit in the 2007 conference finals? The night of the first title in 2012? Trying to pinpoint an exact instant is impossible, but somewhere along the way—and not so long ago—LeBron became the league's elder statesman. The emergence of Stephen Curry as NBA supernova might have been that moment, as his ascent pushes LeBron into a position of seniority.

And with that comes LeBron's first brush with basketball mortality. ■

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ZOOM

WHO
EDDIE GEORGE

WHAT
REHEARSING
FOR *CHICAGO*
ON BROADWAY

WHEN
JAN. 7

WHERE
NEW YORK CITY

What do athletes do when the lights go down? Sometimes they find a way to turn them back on. Do not adjust your specs: This is in fact 1995 Heisman Trophy winner Eddie George. The man who totaled more than 10,000 NFL career rushing yards and made four Pro Bowls is now conquering a new stage—on Jan. 11, he began a seven-week star turn in Broadway's second-longest-running show, *Chicago*, putting his moves to work with a little high-stepping as the male lead, Billy Flynn. This isn't some casting stunt: George has been honing his craft by performing Shakespeare in Nashville, Tennessee, for the past few years. But he does admit it took some soul-searching to take his act to Broadway: "To say, 'Well, I'm going to ignore this other passion because people view me as this and that and I should just stay in my lane'? Nah. My lane is all of that." —MORTY AIN

PHOTOGRAPHS BY
ANDREW HETHERINGTON









¿Estás Listo Para el Fútbol Americano?

There are more than 20 million football fans in Mexico, according to the NFL, second only to the U.S. Meanwhile, five years ago a *second* Mexican college football league was born, and some 8,000 students now play in the country's two leagues. It's boom times in Mexico for the "other" football. And nowhere is that more evident than at the Tazón de Estrellas, an all-star game between teams from Mexican league CONADEIP and D3 schools from the U.S. In December, they met in Tijuana for the seventh year, in front of a sold-out crowd of 2,600. Consider it the kickoff of something big. —REPORTING BY CARLOS NAVA

PHOTOGRAPHS BY SHAUGHN AND JOHN
A COLLABORATION WITH ONE NACIÓN

The teams meet at midfield—Mexico in green, U.S. in white—for pregame ceremonies at CETYS Universidad Estadio Margarita Astiazarán de Fimbres. Says Mexico lineman Diego Alfredo Bedolla Flores: "There's a rivalry now. They're really good. We want to prove we are just as good and that we can compete at their level."



SELFIES, STICKS

Receiver Diego Antonio Yanez Plata (above) herds teammates for a pregame selfie—players whose teams didn't exist six years ago.

It was 2010 when CONADEIP joined ONEFA, Mexico's other college league, in offering *fútbol Americano*. CONADEIP began with eight teams; now there are 20.



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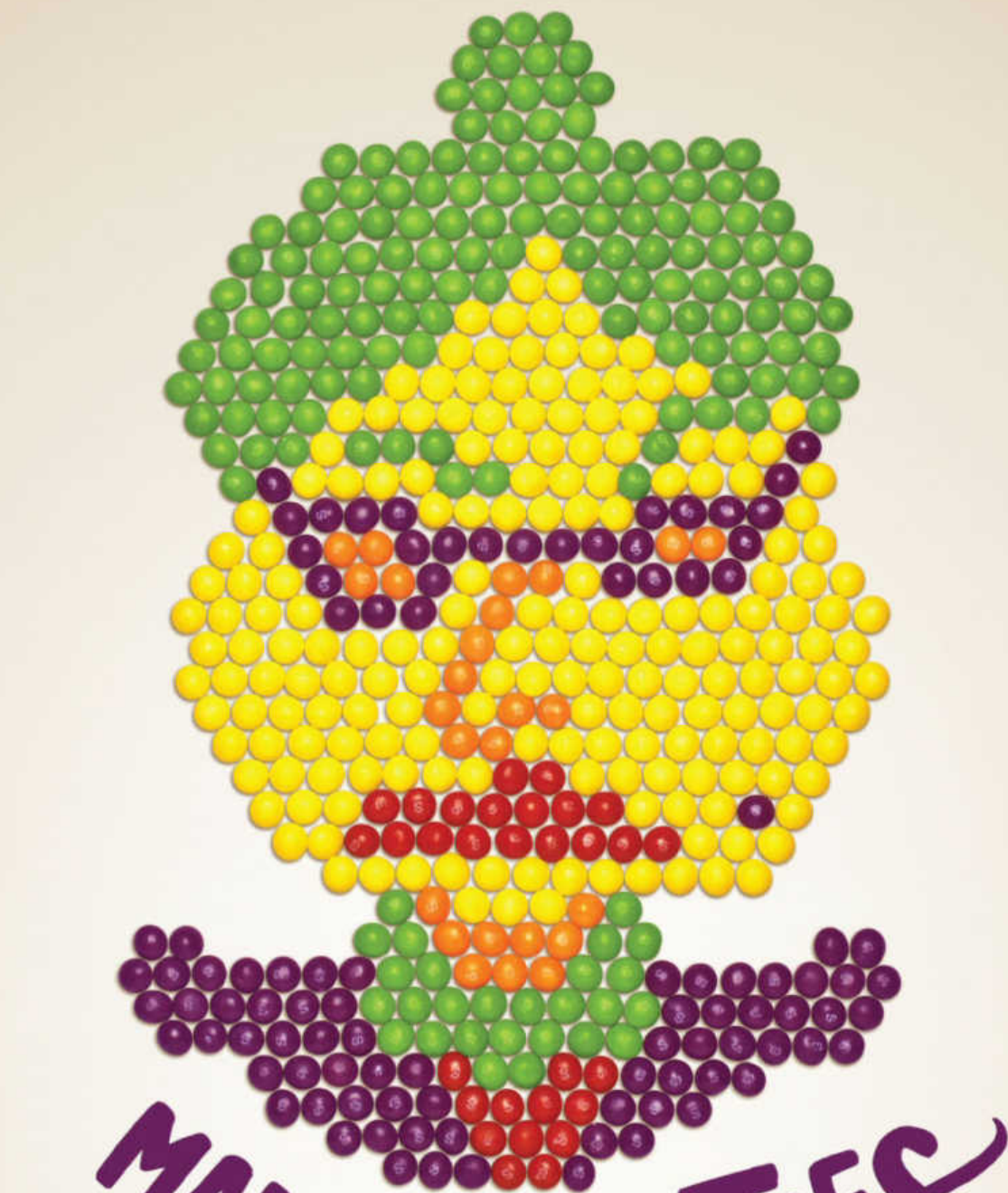
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THE COMEBACK

Mexico won the last meeting between the teams 31-17, tying the series at three wins each. On this day, it holds the U.S. scoreless for three quarters, taking a 14-point lead in front of a raucous home crowd. But when the U.S. scores a fourth-quarter TD with 9:36 remaining and another on a 3-yard pass with 24 seconds left, U.S. coach Don De Waard (above) goes for two, putting Stars & Stripes up 15-14. Even then, Mexico charges downfield, lining up for a 51-yard field goal with time expiring. The kick? No good. But the message is sent: Team Mexico remains on the rise.



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MEET THE FACES OF COLLEGE FOOTBALL IN MEXICO

RUBEN MORALES DE LA FUENTE

"Five or seven years ago, football wasn't considered a big sport in Mexico. Everyone in Mexico just played soccer."

MARIANA CERVANTES AGUIRRE

"I'm a cheerleader in high school. It's very exciting. You can feel the emotion on the field and from the fans."

CARLOS SEBASTIAN OLVERA RIVAS

"We've been playing football in Mexico for a long time. I think it's time for us to take the next step and prove we can play right here."

JORGE LARRINAGA

"My family are football fans, so I watched it when I was little. My first game: the Super Bowl with the Rams vs. Titans. It was an incredible game."

WILLIAM ROBERTO RIVERA LARA

"The level of both teams, it's the same, I think. It was little mistakes—those were the things that made us lose."

OFELIA PARRA

"American football is a family tradition. My husband played; my father-in-law played. My other children were selected for the national team."

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CAMARADERÍA

Last-second losses are hard to shake. But as the thundersticks and face paint suggest, Mexico's football fandom shows no signs of fading—and has been around longer than you think. Ask Parra, who boasts three generations of football in her family, including her son, Mexico quarterback Norman Eduardo Contla Parra. "We always play with a full stadium," she says. "The passion for football is enormous."



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WE'RE DOOMED. SUNDAY'S GOING TO BE A DISASTER. DID YOU WATCH THE OTHER GUYS' LAST GAME? WE DON'T STAND A CHANCE. THEY'RE A GROUP OF WELL-COACHED, SUPER-DISCIPLINED ATHLETIC FREAKS. YOU NEED A WHOLE LOT OF LUCK GOING AGAINST A SQUAD LIKE THAT. IF WE LOSE, THE GRIEVING MAY LAST FOR MONTHS. THIS CITY'S DYING FOR A CHAMPIONSHIP, AND I'M NERVOUS WE'LL COME UP SHORT. I JUST DON'T KNOW. I'VE GOT A BAD FEELING ABOUT THIS. WE'RE HEADING HOME EMPTY HANDED.

WE'RE DESTINED. SUNDAY'S GOING TO BE AMAZING. DID YOU WATCH THE OTHER GUYS' LAST GAME? THEY DON'T STAND A CHANCE. WE'RE A BUNCH OF WELL-COACHED, SUPER-DISCIPLINED ATHLETIC FREAKS. I MEAN, WHO NEEDS A WHOLE LOT OF LUCK WHEN YOU'VE GOT A SQUAD LIKE OURS? WHEN WE WIN, THE PARTY MAY LAST FOR MONTHS. THIS CITY LIVES FOR CHAMPIONSHIPS, AND I'M MORE THAN CONFIDENT WE CAN PULL IT OFF. I JUST KNOW IT IN MY HEART. I FEEL GOOD ABOUT THIS. WE'RE HEADING HOME WITH SOME HARDWARE.





MAYBE THE MOST remarkable thing about the Super Bowl at 50 is that it's only 50. It seems impossible now that America could have ever existed without it—it'd be like France without the baguette, or Canada without unthreatening friendliness. The Super Bowl has not just become an institution, its institutions have become institutions: the commercials, the parties, the predictions, the national anthem. (American civilization may well have peaked at the exact moment Whitney Houston hit the high note at Super Bowl XXV.) Yes, the Super Bowl is excessive. Yes, it's sort of ridiculous (shoutout to Left Shark!). Yes, we've even found a way to make growing the grass for the game a cloak-and-dagger matter of national security. But hey, what could be more American?





SUPER BOWL 50

ALL THAT GLITTERS...

From beer cans to yard-line markers, the NFL has turned a gold 50 into a ubiquitous brand—and proved our weakness for shiny objects.

By Bryan Curtis

5 A.M., DEC. 19. Fifty days before Super Bowl 50. It's black and cold in downtown San Francisco. Heavy rain is beginning to fall. Five workmen grunt as they open the rear door of an 18-wheeler parked near city hall. Inside, there is a giant wooden crate.

The lead workman, Tug Orr, has a name that sounds like the groans of heavy lifting. *People will be here soon!* Orr shouts into his cellphone. *This has to get done!* As rain slides off his ball cap, he gets behind the wheel of a small forklift. With the care of a Jurassic Park game warden, he slides the tines under the crate and lowers it to the ground, then pries off one side of the crate. "There it is," Orr says. "Pretty cool, isn't it?" Illuminated by the headlights of the forklift, they can see a giant, golden No. 50. The workmen move it onto the sidewalk.

Even within San Francisco's everything-is-awesome aesthetic, the 50 makes for an outré piece of street art. It measures 6 feet high. It is made of aluminum and steel. Printed on the front of the digits are photos of the 49 previous Super Bowl rings. The base has the wrong date for the game (it says Feb. 7,



The 50s are coming!
San Francisco is decked out
in them, from Broderick Street
to the Ferry Building
clock tower to City Hall.

2015), so Orr and his men quickly peel it off, leaving only a hashtag—#SB50—by way of explanation. Then they leave. The golden 50 sits in a lonely plaza with seagulls squawking overhead.

After a time, the rain eases and San Franciscans begin to drift by, like patrons who'd accidentally entered an art gallery. A man places a red laundry sack on the ground, turns his back to the golden 50 and practices tai chi. A woman in giant heels passes within inches, her chin held high, as if the 50 is an acquaintance she is trying to ignore. Old men with expensive windbreakers and bedrolls slow briefly, then excuse themselves—they are on a “street retreat” to connect with the homeless.

Eventually and without coaxing, passersby begin to do what the NFL wants: They begin to take selfies with the 50. And they beam the brand all over the world.

This 50 is not alone. San Francisco, the host of the Super Bowl, will soon have nine more 50s in locations around town. On TV, golden 50s glow from the midfield stripe every Sunday; in the refrigerator aisle of 7-Eleven, they glow on the sides of Bud Light cans. To further “romance” the brand—the verb of Super Bowl host committee CEO Keith Bruce—the league went to Tiffany & Co. and asked: Could the jeweler make a golden 50? Like, a *real* golden 50? The resulting bauble, cast in bronze and plated in 18-karat gold, weighs close to 70 pounds.

In the age of CTE, Deflategate and the Revel Casino elevator, it has become common to view the people who run the NFL as bumbling bureaucrats. This characterization is accurate. But it also obscures a much older critique: that the NFL is run by very, very rich men with a weakness for shiny things. Super Bowl 50's golden 50 is worth thinking about, because it suggests that both of these critiques are true.

THE FIRST SIGN that the NFL regarded Super Bowl numbers as branding tools could be glimpsed in 1971. The early Super Bowls were branded with Arabic numerals. To give the game the air of a classic spectacle, the league transformed Super Bowl 5 into Super Bowl V. When the Colts and Cowboys delivered a turnover-filled disaster, writers pounced. “It featured a total of XI fumbles and interceptions and XIV penalties,” the *New York Post's* Larry Merchant wrote.

As the Roman numerals began to stretch across wide-screen TVs, even league men found them inscrutable. Asked by the *Wall Street Journal* which Super Bowls his team had won, Jerry Jones admitted he had no idea because he could not decipher the numerals. But mind-blowing grandiosity was precisely the point. “Excess had no downside,” Michael Oriard, a former-player-turned-writer, noted in his book *Brand NFL*. “The Super Bowl had become not just an NFL championship game and an unofficial national holiday but also the NFL's own best advertisement for itself.”

Indeed, it's a testament to its self-promotional magic that the league was able to *market* inscrutability. In 2006, one NFL advertiser morphed Super Bowl XL into “Super Bowl Xtra-Large.” The following year, the league plucked the “I” from Super Bowl XLI and used it for a playoff slogan: “One Game, One Dream, One Champion.”

Beginning with Super Bowl XL—that is, Super Bowl 40—the NFL saw a Roman numeral on the horizon that even its marketing wizards considered hopeless. L—that is, 50—didn't seem grand. L was clunky, boring. “There was a feeling L was going to be very, very uncool,” says Shandon Melvin, the

league's creative director. The league prepared mock-up logos of “Super Bowl L” and “Super Bowl 50” and brought them before Roger Goodell. Goodell enthusiastically voted to return, for one year only, to an Arabic numeral.

Golden 50s are not unknown in the branding universe—the Canadian doughnut chain Tim Hortons used one to celebrate its 50th anniversary in 2014. To secure its own niche, the NFL first searched for a font. “Modern,” says Melvin. “Very readable, of course. And very bold.” Finding no fonts that fit the bill, Melvin and his team drew the numbers themselves. They chose the color gold not just because 50 is the golden anniversary but because the game is being played in the Golden State.

A 50th Super Bowl, NFL officials thought, also called for the creation of some kind of curio—a real anniversary present. The league considered making a one-time-only gold Lombardi Trophy but decided that would make the other 49 Lombardis seem less precious. “That to us is obviously not what the NFL is about, that parity,” says Jaime Weston, the league's VP of brand and creative.

But what if the NFL created a golden 50 that was presented *alongside* the Lombardi Trophy? That would both preserve tradition and head off any hurt

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That's the amount commissioner Pete Rozelle gave to former NFL executive Mickey Herskowitz to spend on pulling off and promoting Super Bowl I in January 1967, according to *When It Was Just a Game*, by Harvey Frommer. "Spend every penny of it," Rozelle said. By comparison, the Super Bowl 50 host committee alone raised \$50 million, largely just to pay for production costs like staffing, a new field, and entertainment areas for fans.

feelings. That's when the NFL turned to Tiffany & Co. The league will not divulge the value of the Tiffany 50. It simply says it is "priceless."

NOW THE GOLDEN 50 is an omnipresent part of our football lives, like Cleatus the Robot and the NFL shield itself. So what does it say about the state of the league? Well, a couple of things.

First, it's the NFL's way of showing us that in terms of actual gold, the league is doing great. After years of damning reporting and heavy think pieces, we critics allow ourselves to imagine that the NFL is in existential danger. In December, *Concussion* director Peter Landesman boasted, "The issue is the iceberg; the league is the *Titanic*."

There's little evidence that this is true. The NFL expected to take in \$13 billion in revenue in the 2015 season, up from \$12 billion from the 2014 season—which itself was a 14 percent increase from 2013. In the fall, CBS's Les Moonves said he was hawking 30-second Super Bowl ads for \$5 million—\$500,000 more than last year. (Meanwhile, *Concussion* debuted in sixth place at the box office on its opening weekend, earning slightly more than the value of two Super Bowl ads.) The golden 50, then, is a kind of asset statement that proves the league is still filthy rich.

Second, the golden 50 helps clarify fans' relationship with the NFL. Here's what fans don't like about the NFL: Roger Goodell; apparatchiks like Jeff Pash and Mike Kensil, who were shoved into searchlights by Deflategate; and LA-hungry owners like Stan Kroenke, who are forever looking to skip town. Here's what fans like: football. The spectacle, like the golden 50, is the shiny object that keeps us from walking away.

You'd think such on-the-nose plugs would be oppressive, especially as owners

squeeze cities from St. Louis to San Diego for money to build stadiums. But if we feel such angst, we have a funny way of showing it. We like to blast away at Super Bowl hype on Twitter, then spit out "wows" and exclamation points with the first big play. Pretty soon, everyone's reading promo copy.

On Dec. 19, the first person who happens by the 50 near San Francisco's city hall is Jorge Duran. Duran moved to the United States five years ago from the tiny town of Ticul, in the Yucatán. He glances at the strange object in his path and says: "Who's going to play at the Super Bowl? It's Coldplay, right?"

Finally, we might think of the golden 50 in purely metaphorical terms. Imagine the NFL as a billionaire—a smirking, misbehaving billionaire. Imagine us, the fans, as the billionaire's mistress—pliant and ever-available. (Are you free Sunday night? Sure. Thursday? Of course.)

Now imagine the billionaire giving the golden 50 to his mistress as a gift. A token of affection? Sure. A sign of true love? Possibly. But, mostly, the mistress—which is to say, us—would be advised to treat the gift for what it is: a down payment against future bad acts.

WALKING THROUGH THE terminal of the Oakland airport in December, I am a test subject for the power of the 50. I see the 50 on everything from T-shirts to stuffed monkeys. Later, in a commercial for San Francisco's CBS affiliate, KPIX, well-coiffed anchors pose next to a CGI

50 as if it were an alien intelligence that has taken over the newscast. On Dec. 20, I stand on the sidelines of Levi's Stadium, site of the Super Bowl, before kickoff. The golden 50 painted at midfield, so eye-popping on TV, looks small and lusterless, like a yellow stripe on the other side of a parking lot.

"It wouldn't surprise me if there was some kind of opportunity for every fan to somehow touch a gold 50 in some way when they get to the game," Keith Bruce says of the Super Bowl.

In fact, you don't even need tickets to reach out and touch the 50. During Super Bowl week, the walk from Super Bowl City at the foot of Market Street to the NFL Experience theme park will be called "the 50th mile." In December, the Super Bowl host committee placed a golden 50 on the clock tower of the famous Ferry Building. At 5 p.m. on the 19th—the same day workmen deposited the 50 near city hall—the number lights up with white lights. No one from the NFL is standing around to explain—50th Super Bowl, 50 days out, etc. But two 20-something women on Steuart Street turn their backs to the 50 and begin taking selfies anyway.

Meanwhile, the Tiffany & Co. 50—the *real* golden 50—embarked on a garden gnome tour of the Western Hemisphere. It accompanied the Lombardi Trophy to Visa corporate events in Mexico, Panama and Brazil. Later, the 50 traveled to 19 military bases and air shows across the country as part of an "unforgettable photo opportunity" for service members. According to a league representative, the 50 was mostly out of public view after Nov. 21 as the league got into Super Bowl mode.

Or, I should say, the 50s were out of view. The league wound up having Tiffany & Co. make five golden 50s, explains Weston, the NFL vice president. One goes to the Super Bowl winner. A second goes to CBS, the network showing the game. The third goes to the Pro Football Hall of Fame. The destination of the final two is the league office.

The 50 won't be the NFL's last act of numerical chest-beating. In 2019, the league will celebrate its 100th anniversary. Weston says gold is out; she jokes that the new brand might include platinum or diamonds. Such grandeur seems unlikely even for the NFL. But it raises an interesting question: What do you get for the league that has everything? ■

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50

SUPER BOWL

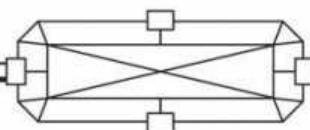
WHEN WHITNEY HIT THE HIGH NOTE

Ten days after the U.S. entered into war, Whitney Houston didn't just sing the national anthem at Super Bowl XXV—she owned it. This is the story of her moment in time.

By Danyel Smith







You have to remember.

Think back.

This is a *generation* ago. A full decade before the United States of America came to a brief but full stop—2,977 people dead and more than 6,000 injured in three states. This was before three New York firefighters raised a star-spangled banner amid the



The fear of terrorism in 1991 led to a heightened level of security at the Super Bowl that we now take for granted.

This is, like, pre-everything. There's no Facebook—barely a decent chat room to flirt in. The Berlin Wall? Buzz-sawed, climbed over and kicked through. Mandela is free, and Margaret Thatcher is out. This is one-way pager, peak Gen X quarter-life crisis time—and it wasn't called a quarter-life crisis back then. North and Saint West's late grandfather had not yet read his friend's letter to the world: "Don't feel sorry for me," attorney Robert Kardashian said to flashing bulbs. "Please think of the real O.J. [Simpson]

“This will not stand, this aggression against Kuwait,” President George H.W. Bush says in August 1990, and by the dawn’s early light of Jan. 17, 1991, a coalition of countries led by the United States drops real bombs on real people and real places in real time on four networks. This was the *first* Gulf War. There are no color-coded threat level advisory posters on airport walls, but the State Department and the Secret Service agree: The possibility of a terror attack is high, and Super Bowl XXV—the Giants vs. the Bills, scheduled just 10 days later—is a soft and glaring bull’s-eye.

**I carve my own path:
as a player, an artist,
a father. It's harder,
being all of yourself,
but this is who I am.
I won't hide any of me.**

- Vernon Davis

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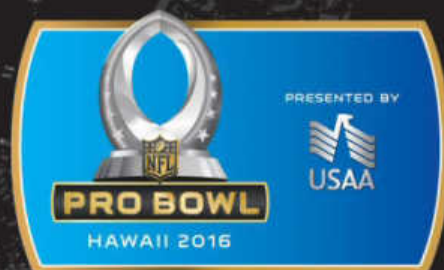


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Q&A

Jason Kamiya

Retired Army Major General • Senior VP at USAA

Much like Pro Bowlers rise to the top among the greatest football players in the world, you rose to the top among the greatest soldiers in the world. What are the keys to becoming a standout among standouts? You are absolutely right that I had the honor to serve among some great soldiers. Differentiation is very, very difficult at the top, and there is all too often very little qualitatively that separates who gets selected for promotion or for key roles. In this context, to stand out among standouts depends on luck and timing more than you think. I've never considered myself better than the other person who wasn't "given the nod" for whatever reason. It was all about doing my best to be the kind of leader our service members deserve and to earn whatever I was fortunate (and lucky) enough to receive. True honor lies in the giving rather than in the receiving, and any good leader allocates his or her focus and energies accordingly.

In the Army, as in football, there are those who lead and there are those who lead well. How does one become not just a leader but a good leader? There has been so much written on this topic. For me, it's as simple as routinely asking yourself the question, "If today they took away my rank, title, and accompanying authority, would my subordinates and teammates still follow me?" If today superstar NFL Player X was simply Mr. X, would the team and fans still follow him? Good leaders ask themselves this question all the time. How you respond requires

serious self-reflection and the discipline to hold yourself accountable to get better every day. As the saying goes, "When BETTER is possible, GOOD is not enough."

As a retired Army soldier, the son of a World War II veteran and a native from Hawaii, what emotions do you feel as the 75th anniversary of the attack on Pearl Harbor approaches, and how do you plan on commemorating it? My dad volunteered for military service even before Pearl Harbor and was undergoing military training on Schofield Barracks at the time of attack. He told me that he was filled with a variety of emotions. Anxiety, as the reality hit that we were at war. Uncertainty, about the future of Japanese Americans, as the enemy shared the same ethnicity. Loyalty to America, his country of birth. And deep resolve to defend it despite the costs. Like many others who served alongside him, Dad didn't talk much about his wartime feelings and experiences. Thus, I commemorate Dec. 7th at a quiet time, in a quiet place, in deep thought of the enormous sacrifices made that day and in the years that followed to keep our nation free.

Your father served with the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, one of the most highly decorated units of World War II. How did he influence you and the path that you chose? Growing up I'd often hear my dad and other Japanese American veterans quietly talk about the Japanese concepts of *on*

(benevolence) and *giri* (moral obligation or duty). Together, these concepts represent a philosophy that says that seniors (leaders) are obliged to protect and nurture their juniors (subordinates). In return, juniors should show their seniors loyalty, respect and gratitude. There is reciprocal benefit at the very core of these relationships ... a physical and emotional tie that binds everyone together. In modern-day context, I'd further translate this into a philosophy that says that the essence of leadership is to serve. Dad rose to the "glorious" rank of private first class, not a high ranking officer as others often assume. Thus, my motives for joining the military had nothing to do with visions of glory or privilege. I feel that I naturally gravitated to military service due in most part by a strong sense of duty. Freedom, I believed, must be earned. And becoming a soldier was my way of earning it. My dad and his buddies who came decades before me likely felt the same way, and I am proud to have been able to follow in their footsteps and continue their legacy.

In what ways do you find yourself applying the leadership attributes that you developed over the course of your 33-year Army career in your everyday life? There is no deliberate thought process you go through to determine when to apply leadership attribute X to situations Y and Z. To do so would be unnatural, artificial and inauthentic. Subordinates will quickly pick up on this. It's really not rocket science. Leadership attributes define who you are

As the NFL's best gather in Hawaii for the Pro Bowl, we take a moment to remember the attack that took place just minutes from Aloha Stadium nearly 75 years ago. This year, people across the nation will commemorate the anniversary of the attack on Pearl Harbor, which affected generations of Americans from all backgrounds: from the brave men and women who went to war to the sons and daughters who followed in their footsteps. We pause to remember those who were lost, and we thank all those who defend our country.

BOR

**WHEN BETTER IS
POSSIBLE,
GOOD IS NOT
ENOUGH.**



In partnership with the NFL, USAA – the Official Military Appreciation Sponsor of the NFL – brings Pro Bowl players and members of the military together to interact in fun and educational ways.

Clockwise from top left: Players sign autographs for military fans; players and the local military community work together to build a new fitness trail on base; Pro Bowlers experience what it is like to be an airman for a day; a Pro Bowl practice is held on base.

and ultimately are manifested in natural behaviors ... how you think, make decisions and act instinctively. In uniform, it was all about taking care of soldiers, about setting conditions for individual and team success and about accomplishing the mission. In civilian life there is no difference.

I am very fortunate to work for an organization that promotes a workplace culture based on the same values that good leaders hold dearest. At USAA we call this The USAA Standard: Keep our members and mission first; live our core values of honesty, integrity, loyalty and service; build trust; create conditions for people to succeed; purposely include diverse perspectives; and innovate and build for the future.

What qualities do you find universally among leaders, whether it's in the Army, on the football field or anywhere else? There are three basic qualities that I believe are table stakes for any leader. First, always place others before self—what's good for the team before what's good for the individual. Your primary job is to serve. Leaders are appointed to use their role to serve, not anointed to do anything they want. In sports terms I guess you could say that the name on the front of the jersey should always come before the name that's on the back. Second, always do things for the right reasons. If the primary motivation is to stroke your ego or personal gain, then you've veered way off course, and your subordinates and teammates will know it. Finally, good leaders are always learning and adapting. Carve time for brutally honest self-

evaluation and reflection. Hold yourself accountable for making improvement ... for your personal successes as well as for your failures. As mentioned previously, ask yourself the tough question, "If today they took away my rank, title and authority, would my subordinates and teammates still follow me?" Ask it frequently.

How has your heritage shaped you as an Army soldier, as a son and as a father? Beyond my Asian American heritage, I believe that where I was born and raised also influenced my development. Hawaii is a melting pot of ethnicities and cultures. On one dimension, this gave me a very deep appreciation for how different we all are and how our differences can be a good thing if approached in the right way. On another more important dimension, this taught me that we really have a lot of things in common if we can only learn to see beyond our differences. As a soldier, it accelerated learning the value of the combined arms team where infantry, armor, field artillery, engineers and army aviation work together to accomplish the mission. As a more senior military leader, it taught me the value of joint and combined operations where U.S. forces from the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marines operate in concert with multinational military coalition partners and government and nongovernment agencies. Finally, as a son and father, growing up in Hawaii taught me the value of tolerance, of being more inclusive versus exclusive, and how to embrace rather than defensively react to diversity of thought.



SUPER BOWL 50

The Goodyear blimp? Grounded. A Blackhawk patrols instead. Commissioner Paul Tagliabue's annual Super Gala gala? Canceled. Concrete bunkers gird the parking lot of old Tampa Stadium, and a 6-foot-high chain-link rises quickly behind that. Canines sniff chassis, and ushers wave metal detectors. SWAT teams walk the stadium roof with machine guns. Alternate dates, due to a fear of mass casualties, are considered. For a *Super Bowl*.

"[It] was the shape of things to come," former defensive back Everson Walls recalled in 2013 for *USA Today*. "The security was incredible. I think that's the first time they checked bags and really were concerned about terrorist threats." It was tense. "Players were discussing privately if there would be a draft," former Giants tight end Howard Cross said last year in the *New York Post*. "And whether our younger brothers might be drafted."

There is a ghost game hovering too—the one played two days after President John F. Kennedy was assassinated in 1963. It is known as the NFL's "mourning game" and opened with a lone bugler playing taps. Pete Rozelle was ravaged in the media for going through with it. He'd struggled with the decision, and it haunted him his whole career. But Commissioner Tagliabue will not have the regrets of his predecessor. Tagliabue—a Jersey City basketball-playing attorney who'd represented the league against the USFL—arrived at Super Bowl XXV in a flak jacket. And he had Whitney Elizabeth Houston.

HOUSTON WAS 27 when she sang "The Star-Spangled Banner" at Super Bowl XXV. She was already the first artist in history to have seven consecutive singles go to No. 1 on *Billboard's* Hot 100 pop chart. This Whitney data, of course, does not yet include the zeniths and descents

of the second half of her recording career. It doesn't include the impact she made on-screen in (and on the soundtracks of) 1992's *The Bodyguard*, 1995's *Waiting to Exhale* and 1996's *The Preacher's Wife*. It doesn't quantify, because there is no quantifying, the influence she continues to have on Beyonce Knowles Carter, Adele Adkins, Alicia Keys, Lady Gaga and other pop singers who rose in her wake. It can't articulate the profound relief she granted black teens in the mid-1980s. Just the *sight* of her, onstage, on MTV, on an album cover—Houston was proof

of life. It became easier for black girls in particular to flex, to breathe—to revel in visibility and possibility.

Houston wanted more than mainstream pop success. She wanted mainstream pop equality. "Nobody," she told *Rolling Stone* in 1993, "makes me do anything I don't want to do." And that had become the definition of her relationship with the music business. She'd come by her ambition via nature and nurture and aspired to a level pop playing field that had been systematically denied her forebears. She was earwitness to artists who'd thrashed and thrived in an intricately segregated music industry—not the least of whom was her own mother, Emily "Cissy" Houston, leader of the pop-gospel Sweet Inspirations, who sang behind Jimi Hendrix, Mahalia Jackson, Bette Midler, Linda Ronstadt, Aretha Franklin and more. Whitney was 6 when the Inspirations were singing backup for Elvis Presley in Las Vegas. "[She] taught me how to sing," Houston said in 1996. "Taught me ... where it comes from. How to control it. How to command it. She sacrificed and taught me everything that she knew."

Whitney's distant cousin is pioneering operatic soprano Leontyne Price—one of the first black singers to earn global acclaim in an art form still using yellow- and blackface in 2016. Whitney's first cousin is Dionne Warwick, who in partnership with Burt Bacharach (and in stride with Nancy Wilson) crystallized the acutely talented, crisply enunciated, pretty and sexually hushed black female pop star prototype that Whitney, for the first few years of her career, clicked right into. The fashion model's body type. The disciplined tamping down of racial and class signifiers. The gleam in her eyes and smile that said dreams are real.

You have to remember. She practiced for Super Bowl XXV. In a demure fur hat



Mercedes-Benz

PRESENTS

THREE STARS

WE ASKED TWO ESPN ANCHORS AND ONE FAN TO SHARE THEIR TOP SUPER BOWL MEMORIES.

FIRST STAR

"When Marcus Allen spun, cut and sprinted his way to that amazing 74-yard touchdown run in Super Bowl XVIII, he not only produced one of the best plays in title game history, he reminded a Kentucky boy why the former USC star was his favorite player."

—MICHAEL EAVES

SECOND STAR

"For Super Bowl XLVIII, my husband and I were in our Seahawks gear, sitting in a sea of Broncos fans, when our D collapsed on Peyton. *Ball in the air. Malcolm Smith grabs it and weaves 69 yards for the score!* Seattle 22, Denver 0!"

—LISA KERNEY

THIRD STAR

"I watched Super Bowl XXV in Iraq at zero dark thirty. Tensions were high; we all knew we were going in. We saw the crowd and the jets fly over as Whitney Houston sang the national anthem. There wasn't a dry eye in that theater of war. I cry as I write this. America had us!"

—IAN RICHARDT

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used to and more."
-Brad



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and with a case of nerves, Houston sang the national anthem at a Nets-Lakers game in New Jersey early in Kareem Abdul-Jabbar's 1988-89 retirement season. And she was in even better form for a February 1989 performance of "One Moment in Time," a song she recorded for the *1988 Summer Olympics Album*. Houston wasn't featured in the video for the worldwide hit, but onstage at the 1989 Grammys, she made her ownership of the song clear.

On a large screen were slow-motion shots of triumph—doves fly, FloJo receives a medal and Greg Louganis is poised to back-flip. The screen rose as Houston, in a white gown, stepped out with aplomb. There was a tiny cross at the base of her throat and a full orchestra in shadow behind her. "You're a winner," she belted, "for a lifetime." And then she allowed herself the tiniest of kicks—of church—and a step forward. And as she sang the words "I will be free," three times in a row, in three different ways, the audience leapt to its feet.

You have to understand. Key to American blues is the notion that by performing them and by experiencing them being performed, one can escape them. "I will be free," sang this black American woman to a mostly white, tucked-in-tuxes audience attending an event at which black achievement has been and remains segregated and minimized. This is our most familiar pop dance. This is white American affluence being comforted by the performance of black freedom—and so, feeling forgiven. The polished intonations. The buffed exertion. The testimony. This is the conflation of mass sport and mass music. This is bodies and souls at work. This—one of America's most influential creations and biggest imports—is the uplift of big blues.

JIM STEEG WAS, for over 25 years, in charge of the Super Bowl for the NFL.

Four years ago, he recalled the lead-up to XXV's opening ceremonies for SportsBusinessDaily.com: "In early January ... our coordinator of Super Bowl pregame activities Bob Best ... produced a recording of the Florida Orchestra for national anthem producer Rickey Minor. ... A week later, Minor flew to Los Angeles to have Whitney record the vocal track. Amazingly ... it was done in one take."

Yes—Whitney Houston's version of "The Star-Spangled Banner" was prerecorded. "There's no way to rehearse the sound of the crowd ... coming at you," Minor said years later. "You don't know where the first note begins."

The NFL had no qualms about the song being prerecorded, even if Houston would be criticized for it. The NFL's issue was with the meter. "The Star-Spangled Banner" is written in 3/4 time—not quite brisk, but waltzy. Houston and vocal arranger Minor, as well as bassist-arranger John L. Clayton, changed it to 4/4, slowing it down. "All was in place for what many of us

thought would be one of the greatest versions of the national anthem ever performed," Steeg said.

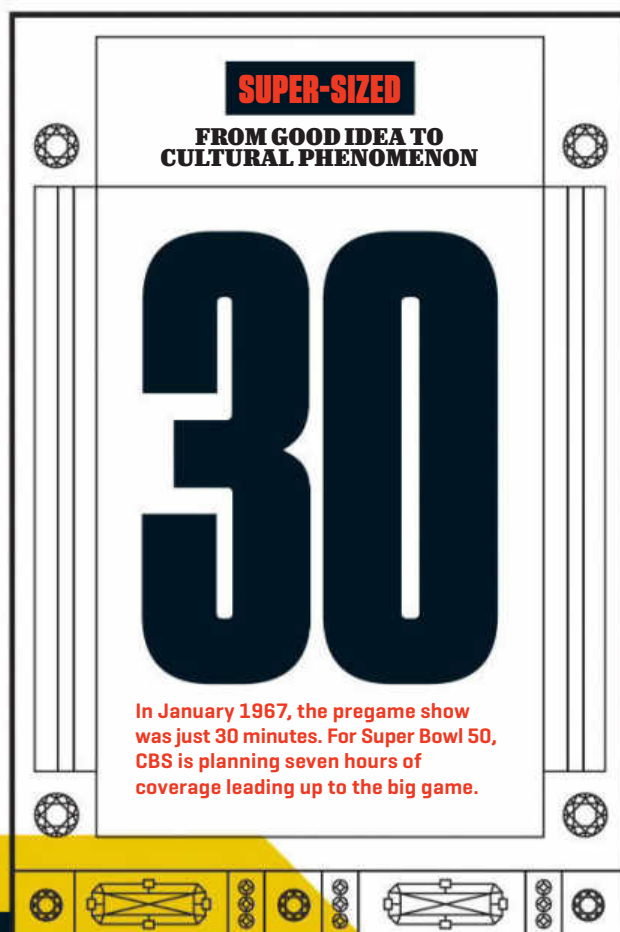
"Then on Jan. 17," as Steeg further recalled it, "senior executives with the NFL asked to hear the recording. A tape was overnighted to Buffalo, where the AFC championship game was played. The next day I was told the version was viewed as too slow and difficult to sing along with. Could I ask to have it redone." Perhaps the NFL was afraid there would be discontent in the stands, as there had been when Jose Feliciano dared to find himself and the times in the anthem before Game 5 of the 1968 World Series. So Steeg called John Houston, Whitney's father and her manager at the time. "The conversation was brief," Steeg said. "There would be no rerecording."

You have to understand: By slowing it down, Team Houston and the Florida Orchestra—under the direction of Chinese conductor Jahja Ling—not only increased the national anthem's level of technical difficulty, they amplified its soul. They made it the blues.

"And now, to honor America, especially the brave men and women serving our nation in the Persian Gulf and throughout the world, please join in the singing of our national anthem. The anthem will be followed by a flyover of F-16 jets from the 56th Tactical Training Wing at MacDill Air Force Base and will be performed by the Florida Orchestra under the direction of Maestro Jahja Ling and sung by Grammy Award winner Whitney Houston." —Frank Gifford

YOU HAVE TO remember.

It's a fine warm winter night in Tampa. The Giants' own Faultless Frank is on the ABC Super Bowl team. Every Hall of Fame hair is in place, and there are no signs of the brain trauma that will later plague him. Al Michaels has not yet uttered the phrase "wide right."



Madonna's "Justify My Love" and Janet Jackson's "Love Will Never Do (Without You)" are battling on terrestrial radio, and terrestrial radio is the ruling class. There's no streaming. No YouTube. The iPod is 10 years away. Want to party? Hit the creaky shuffle on your CD player. At Tampa Stadium, the pregame jam is Snap's "The Power": *It's gettin' / It's gettin' / It's gettin' kinda hectic.*

It is, in fact. The ESPN team is broadcasting from outside the stadium. As Andrea Kremer reports at the time, "Every single vehicle within 200 feet of the stadium is completely searched. There will be a large, well-rehearsed team in place at Tampa Stadium. And it isn't just the Bills and the Giants but rather the security forces designed to safeguard the Super Bowl event while trying not to convey undue alarm to fans, or turn the stadium into an armed camp."

But there are more than 1,700 security professionals on the grounds. And if it seems every person is waving a tiny U.S. flag, that's because a tiny U.S. flag has been placed on every seat. The field is a kaleidoscope of honor guard uniforms and team uniforms and kids doing a red, white and blue card stunt. Central is the entire Florida Orchestra—standing in full dress, signaling serious and formal.

Then Whitney Houston steps onto a platform—it looks to be the size of a card table—in a loose white tracksuit with mild red and blue accents. She has on white Nike Cortezes with a red swoosh. No heels in which to step daintily, and definitely not a gown. Her hair is held back by a pretty but plain ivory bandanna—there are no wisps blowing onto her face. No visible earplugs to take away from the naturalness of the moment. Everything is arranged to convey casual confidence.

Here we begin. Snare drums so crisp. Bass drum so bold. Houston holds the mic stand for a moment but then clasps her

BY SLOWING THE SONG DOWN, WHITNEY AMPLIFIED ITS SOUL. SHE MADE IT THE BLUES.

hands behind her back—it reads as clearly as a military at-ease. Her stance says: *We came to play.* Says, in the parlance of the 'hood, and on behalf of her country: *Don't start none, won't be none. All we have to do is relax, and we're all going to win.*

Like the best heroes, Whitney—the black girl from Jersey who worked her way to global stardom, made history and died early from the weight of it—makes bravery look easy. Although the stadium hears the prerecorded version, she sings live into a dead mic. The image of her singing is interspersed with faces of the fans, of the soldiers at attention and of the U.S. flag and flags of the wartime coalition countries blowing in the breeze. She is calmly joyful—cool, actually, and free of fear. And when she arrives at *Oh, say [cymbal] does our star- [cymbal] spangled banner yet wave*, she moves to lift the crowd. It's a question. It's always been a question. And she sings it like an answer. People were weeping in the stands, weeping in their homes. The song itself became a top-20 pop hit. Folks called in and requested Whitney Houston's national anthem on the radio. The version NFL executives thought might be too slow, people sang along to as they drove down the street.

SUPER BOWL XXV is defined as much by the launch of Desert Storm and Security Nation and by Whitney Houston as by the game itself. That day was the start of a branding relationship between the armed forces and the NFL that has grown vinelike around a state of perpetual war.

Houston is of course gone now, but she remains the ghost in the machine—memorialized, memed, GIFed and in many quarters damn near prayed to. We have her massive ballads, and her bad reality TV, but her "Star-Spangled Banner" is much the reason for Houston's continued presence—she boldly interpo-

lated our anthem and sang it as well as it will ever be sung. Remember? When her version was rereleased in the aftermath of the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks—Houston gave her fees to charity—she roused and comforted a nation again. It was the last top-10 hit of her career.

Most singers want out of that song. Most reach awkwardly for one note or another, or miss it altogether. It's not just that the song is a difficult one. It's difficult in front of people who want to feel the pride in the storybook words. They want to wave their ball caps and whoop in the pause after *O'er the land of the free*. They want to be landlords in the home of the brave. Whitney's version made it all absolute, for a moment. Her arms were wide and reaching slightly up at the end, a pose familiar to many Americans, across races. Her head was back, as one's can be when victorious, and as one's can be when asking for and ecstatically receiving the glory of God.

Bright bulbs flashed and popped off behind her. Floodlights intersected with the hazy Florida sunshine and created stairways to heaven. You could almost walk up there. To where the four war jets are.

You have to understand. ■



Jess Hyland, City Explorer

Underground dumpling shop in Chinatown.
Rooftop art exhibit in Portland. My schedule
is full to the brim with culture. AT&T connects
my smartwatch to my calendar, so I know to
leave Shakespeare in the Parking Lot in time
for my reservation at the pop-up pizza parlor.

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GONE IN 30 SECONDS

The biggest Sunday of the year means even bigger ads. But how much money is getting pumped into your TV during the Super Bowl? We look inside the numbers at the game within the game—which, for some, might be the game itself.

YOUR AD DOLLARS, HARD AT WORK

In 1985, 115.9 million viewers watched Super Bowl XIX, and the game had its first million-dollar minute in advertising. In 1995, a 30-second ad cost \$1.15 million. By 2015, 161.3 million were tuning in, and the average price tag for a 30-second spot had cracked \$4.5 million. Nobody thought to track the really cool stats until recently. But a look at the past 20 years shows some serious late-game surge.

TOTAL DOLLARS SPENT IN ADVERTISING, IN MILLIONS*



	1995	2015
NUMBER OF ADVERTISERS	35	45
NUMBER OF BRANDS	37	47
NUMBER OF ADS	52	60

TOTAL ADVERTISING MINUTES



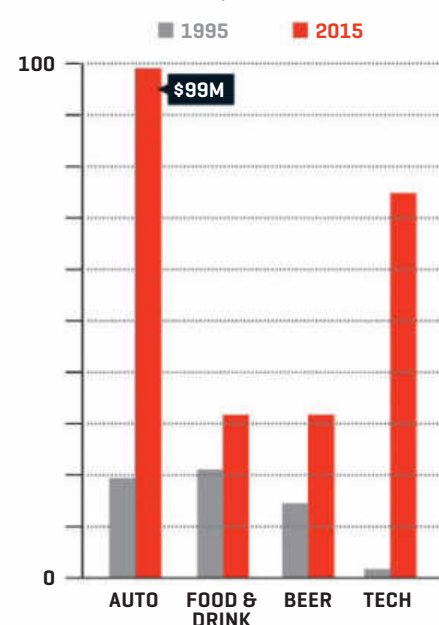
DISRUPTING SUPER BOWL ADVERTISING SINCE 1995

As long as there are Super Bowls—and there will *always* be Super Bowls—there will be spots for beer, chips and trucks. But the story of the past 20 years has been the rise of ads for stuff inconceivable in Super Bowl I. Seriously, you try explaining GoDaddy.com to Vince Lombardi.

TOTAL ADVERTISING, IN MINUTES



NUMBER OF DOLLARS SPENT, IN MILLIONS*



SOURCE: KANTAR MEDIA; *1995 DOLLAR FIGURES ADJUSTED FOR INFLATION.



What does it take to sell an ad on Super Bowl Sunday? A song, a smile, a sledgehammer, a sock puppet or the Force.

I'D LIKE TO TEACH THE WORLD TO ... WATCH ADS

1972 Coca-Cola airs "I'd Like to Buy the World a Coke." The song from the New Seekers is rewritten as "I'd Like to Teach the World to Sing" and becomes a No. 1 hit in the U.K.

1974 Master Lock puts its padlock to the test by having a marksman fire a rifle at it. Versions of the ad will air for 20 years; yearly sales rise from \$35M in '73 to \$200M in '94.

1980 Steelers defensive tackle Mean Joe Greene trades a filthy game jersey for a Coke and makes history. But the iconic ad actually first aired in the 1979 MLB playoffs.

1984 Apple's dystopian "1984" ad sends a sledgehammer through the PC market. The spot almost didn't air: Apple's board of directors tried to sell off the Super Bowl ad time.

1989 Bud Bowl I, the "Battle of the Century," debuts with Bob Costas in the booth. Bud wins on a last-second FG. The cans storm the field. It was a simpler time.

1993 McDonald's showcases the greatest shooting contest ever: Jordan vs. Bird. Winner gets a Big Mac and fries.

1995 "Bud ... weis ... errrr." Three dyspeptic frogs capture America's heart and persuade us to drink beer through hypnotic guttural sounds. The ad costs an estimated \$2.3M.

2000 Pets.com joins the online ad rush as its mascot sings "If You Leave Me Now," then folds less than 10 months later, and the tech bubble bursts. Blame the sock puppet.

2010 A bare-chested Isaiah Mustafa locks eyes with the camera, and America becomes transfixed by Old Spice's "The Man Your Man Could Smell Like." He's on a horse.

2011 Volkswagen scores with a boy in a Darth Vader helmet who tries to use the Force on the family Passat. The ad is viewed more than 10 million times online prior to kickoff.

IT'S GOOD TO BE THE KING

Whether through tireless Clydesdales, talking frogs or hard-partying dogs in need of intervention, Bud and Bud Light have turned the anthropomorphization of beer consumption into high art.

TOP 10 IN-GAME AD BUYERS SINCE 1995

BUDWEISER	\$213.7M
BUD LIGHT	\$201.9M
COCA-COLA	\$114.5M
PEPSI	\$106.4M
UNIVERSAL PICTURES	\$95.0M
DORITOS	\$83.4M
TOYOTA	\$70.8M
CHEVROLET	\$68.5M
PARAMOUNT PICTURES	\$64.5M
GODADDY.COM	\$60.9M



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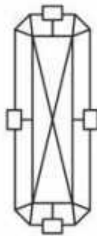
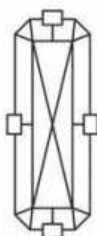
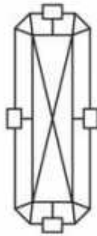
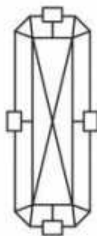
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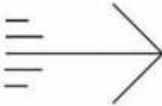
BLADES OF GLORY



Not all grass is
created equal.
Here at West
Coast Turf, sod
is scrutinized.

It grew for over a year on secret membranes with special ingredients and high-tech tools, never knowing whether it would get the chance to live up to its full potential. Finally, Field No. 2 is ready for the big stage at Super Bowl 50. Question is, can it withstand the weight of the game?

By Tommy Tomlinson



A REMOTE PIECE OF FARMLAND

east of San Francisco, sometime in the fall. The buyer arrives to inspect the product. The farmers have tended to it for months, keeping it warm under grow blankets, dry under tarps, its very existence under wraps. The farmers have leverage; few places grow product of this quality. The buyer has leverage; he can hold out for the best.

The buyer takes the product in his hands. He rubs it with his fingers. He inhales deeply, taking in the aroma. He pinches off a bit and tastes it, to judge the quality and texture.

Around the first of December, the phone rings at the farm. The buyer is on the line. The deal is made. The discussion turns to delivery—to Levi's Stadium.

You've probably never thought about the turf at the Super Bowl, which means the people who grow and tend to the turf at the Super Bowl have done their jobs. Turf is big business, and the stakes are high.

Imagine what would happen if a running back, rounding the corner for the winning touchdown in America's biggest game, planted his foot to cut and hit nothing but loose dirt. Imagine if he tore an Achilles as he fell. Imagine the kilotons of outrage detonated in that moment. Imagine millions of dollars in bets swinging on a single crappy patch of grass. The field is important to football the way a microphone is important to Adele. You don't notice it if it works. It can ruin everything if it doesn't.



The same company that provided the field for Super Bowl 50 supplied the troubled turf at Levi's the past two years.

THE DEAL PRETTY much happened that way a few months back at a place called West Coast Turf in Livingston, California. The buyer was a man named Ed Mangan, who has worked 27 Super Bowls and has been the Super Bowl field director since 2000. (The rest of the year, his main gig is maintaining Turner Field in Atlanta, home of the Braves.) Mangan uses fancy tools like Clegg hammers (which gauge the firmness of the turf) and torsion testers (which measure the traction that cleats get on a field). But sometimes it comes down to the senses. He really does take a deep whiff. He really does pinch off a bit of the soil and taste it. "Pulling on it, touching on it, feeling it, smelling it," Mangan says, "everything is involved."

Whenever the Super Bowl is played on natural grass, the NFL replaces the field. The practice started after Super Bowl XXVII at the Rose Bowl (Cowboys 52, Bills 17—the Leon Lett game). Pasadena had been soaked with 16 inches of rain that January—nearly four times the average—and even with tarping, the NFL had to patch ruined pieces of the field. After that, the NFL started replacing the turf with sod grown especially for the game. That leaves just four or five weeks to tear out the old turf and install the new turf. There's no grow-in time. It has to be ready to go.

And there aren't many choices when it comes to fields. This is West Coast Turf's eighth Super Bowl. Bent Oak Farm in



Direct from our imagination. Introducing the all-new Civic.





SUPER BOWL 50

Foley, Alabama, has done seven. John Marman, VP of sales and marketing at West Coast Turf, could think of only one other place that grows Super Bowl-quality grass: Carolina Green, outside Charlotte. The NFL has reserved one of Bent Oak's fields as the backup. Like the first runner-up for Miss America, it's ready in case the winning field cannot fulfill its duties.

Levi's Stadium, home to the 49ers and this year's Super Bowl, is just 110 miles from West Coast Turf. In fact, West Coast Turf provides the regular-season field too. And that brings a twist: In the two seasons the 49ers have played at Levi's, fans have booed the turf almost as much as the team. In 2014, then-coach

Jim Harbaugh pulled the 49ers off the field in a public practice after players slipped on the grass. In 2015, the team canceled another public practice after continued problems. And in October, Ravens kicker Justin Tucker's plant foot disappeared into a divot as he attempted a fourth-quarter field goal. The 45-yarder doinked off the right upright, and the Ravens lost 25-20. If something like that decides Super Bowl 50, we'll still be talking about it at Super Bowl 550.

George Toma, the legendary groundskeeper who has worked every Super Bowl, says the subsoil was the issue. "The sand was more like scrabble, so it never firmed up," he told reporters at the unrolling of the Super Bowl turf at the stadium. "The earlier problems were because the roots had the wrong sand."

The 49ers replaced the 9-inch layer of subsoil during the season. They also resodded the field, changing the variety of grass from Bandera Bermuda to a hybrid Bermuda 419 strain. The hybrid held up for the rest of the season. It's the same type of grass the NFL is using for the Super Bowl.

"Levi's is a new facility," Mangan says, "and they've had their growing pains."

THE 669 TONS of sod delivered to Levi's in January is a whole lot different from the grass on your front lawn. Or anyone else's.

For starters, it grows backward. If you're planting grass at home, you spread some seed on the ground and the roots grow down into it. The Super Bowl turf seeds never touch regular ground. The turf starts out as hybrid Bermuda grass planted in a thin layer of soil laid down on a ...

Well, uh, a —

"... a semipermeable membrane," Marman says. "I can't really say any more than that. There's certain proprietary things that we don't talk about."

Two irresistible flavors

I can't believe they're making a megastar like me do this.

Hey, I know those guys.



OK, so the thin layer of soil is spread on a big sheet of Secret Membrane. The grass can't grow downward because of the Secret Membrane, so the roots grow sideways, braiding with the plant's rhizomes—horizontal stems that grow underground. Then West Coast Turf adds a thin layer of sand. How thin? That's proprietary too. The roots grow up from the Secret Membrane through the Secret Layer of Sand. After several more layers of sand—how many? Yes, of course, a Secret Number of Layers—the final step is overseeding the whole thing with rye grass for extra strength and color. You end up with a 2-inch-thick mat that is flexible but strong, like a sheet of plywood. Regular sod is ready

SUPER-SIZED

**FROM GOOD IDEA
TO CULTURAL PHENOMENON**

\$12

Fans balked at the \$12 top ticket price for Super Bowl I; there were more than 30,000 empty seats at the LA Coliseum. This year? Tickets were going for an average of \$5,500 on the secondary market in mid-January.

to harvest in four to six months. The Super Bowl sod takes a year and a half.

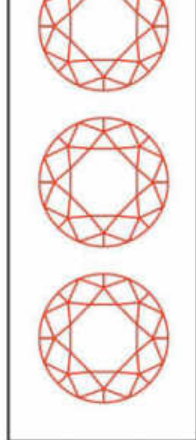
West Coast Turf's field didn't have any special signifier as it grew—it was just called Field No. 2. "We didn't want to jinx ourselves," Marman says. But everybody knew the field might be used for the Super Bowl, so it was treated with more care than many newborns. Workers covered it with a gigantic custom-made blanket on cool nights and a series of tarps on rainy days. Too much water is the enemy. It can lead to pythium, a form of root rot that covers a field with brown spots. The warning sign of pythium is mycelium, a white thready vegetation. If you see something that looks like dirty cotton in your grass,

under 200 calories.

I don't like the way people are looking at us.

I better be getting paid overtime for this.





you're screwed. West Coast Turf got 3 inches of rain the first week of January. Workers obsessively checked the tarps. No dirty cotton.

A football field takes up about an acre and a third of grass, or about 58,000 square feet. Including extra turf for sideline areas, and a little set aside for patches on game day, West Coast Turf harvested 75,000 square feet for the Super Bowl field. On moving day, workers cut it into 40-by-3½-foot strips. They rolled up each strip and ended up with 536 rolls, each one weighing 2,500 pounds. They loaded those onto 24 trucks and took them to Levi's. The turf was off the ground for about four hours before being installed at the stadium. Special machines cut it and roll it up and lay it back down, meshing the pieces together.

Sometimes the process is even more elaborate. Last year the NFL used a field from Bent Oak in Alabama for the game in Arizona. That required 34 refrigerated trucks taking shrink-wrapped rolls of turf more than 2,000 miles.

Mangan's crew of 25 to 30 maintains several other fields during Super Bowl week—each team gets two or three practice fields, and fans run around on a field at the NFL Experience. But Levi's gets the most attention. Mangan and his crew (assisted by the 49ers' grounds crew) inspect the field before the game and watch from the sideline during it.

And they're as nervous as any fan, just for different reasons. When Marman is at home flipping channels during a normal sports weekend, he'll stop when he gets to a game being played on one of his fields. Most of the time, he says, he doesn't care who's winning.

"I root for the field."

MARK PALUCH OF Bent Oak Farm sums up the stress on a football field this way: "Can it hold up to a 340-pound lineman,



Groundskeeper George Toma, 87, prepares turf for his 50th Super Bowl.

and then another 340-pound lineman jumping on his ass?"

But it's not just the 60 minutes of football. The turf has to withstand the pregame TV crews and everybody else tromping around out there. "The cheerleaders stir up more s--- than the players," Paluch says. "They stomp up and down in the same spot the whole game." That's why Mangan checks in with them in the days leading up to the game. It might be nice to leave the boots at home for rehearsal, he says. Maybe go with your sneakers.

The biggest worry, though, is whatever spectacle somebody dreams up for the halftime show. Want to give a grounds crew night sweats? Whisper a phrase like "88 baby grand pianos pulled by tractors." That's what they had at halftime of Super Bowl XXII in San Diego (Chubby Checker and the Rockettes!). Apparently baby grands pulled by tractors can dig ruts into a football field. After this year's halftime show, Mangan and his crew will scour the field for loose screws or bolts, or shards of piano in the event that Coldplay destroys its instruments in a Who-like fit of rage.

Nobody worried much about the field in the early years. At Super Bowl IV, the field at Tulane Stadium turned to mush after a cold snap. Toma masked the damage with sawdust and wood shavings painted green. Over the years, there have been other minor disasters. At Super Bowl XXII (the one with the baby grands), pigeons flocked to the field to eat the grass seeds embedded in the turf. Toma got a vet to provide dead pigeons to scare off the live ones. Then somebody wrote a story that the NFL was killing pigeons. The next year, the crew was draining water at Joe Robbie Stadium in Miami and somebody left the

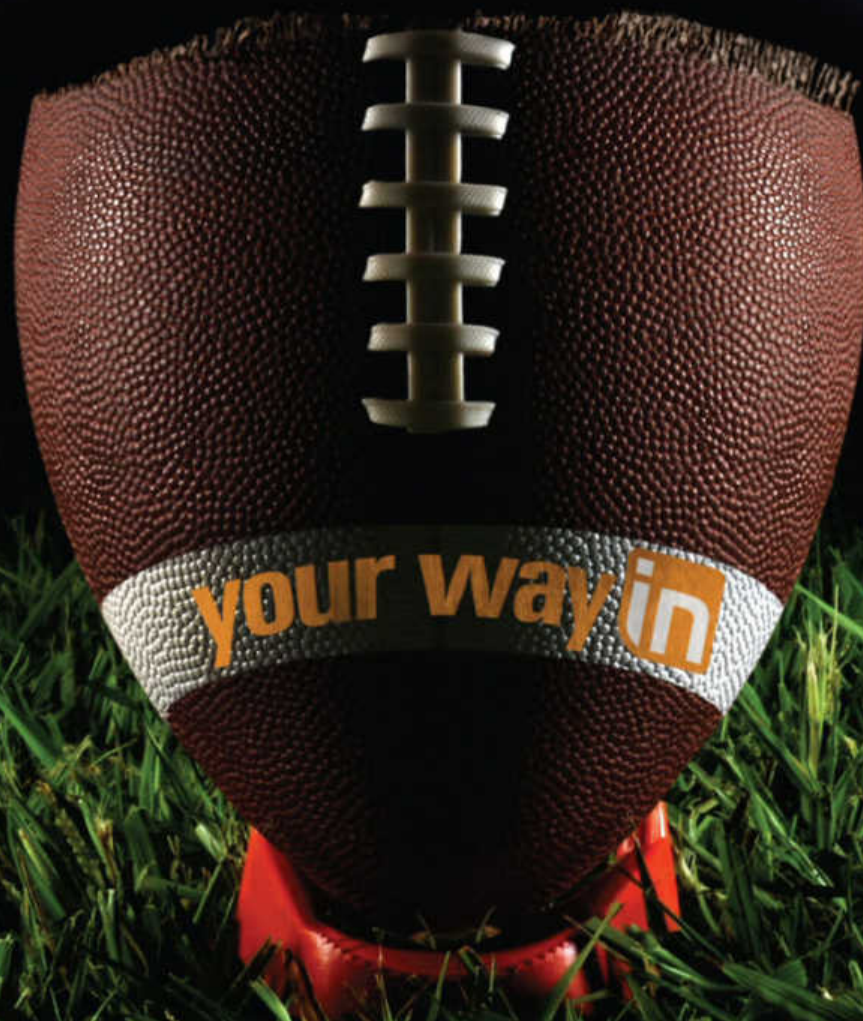
underground pump on too long. It sucked out chunks of the NFL logo at midfield.

This is all a bigger deal than it used to be—because everything about the Super Bowl is a bigger deal than it used to be. The modern Super Bowl field has to be extra strong to carry the weight of the modern Super Bowl: not just the bigger and faster players, not just the mini-Coachella at halftime, but the pressure for everything to be perfect. The turf can't detract from the game. It can't come up in chunks. It can't not shine.

Mangan is already planning for next year in Houston. Already there are worries. The grass field at NRG Stadium has been bad for years, and after just one home game this season, the Texans switched to artificial turf, though the team plans to switch back in 2016.

Either way, on one of those big sod farms somewhere in America, the candidates for next year's Super Bowl field are growing. At some point, Mangan will check them out, pulling and tugging and stroking. He'll inhale, hoping his nose senses nothing but clean grass. And then, just to make sure, he'll pinch off a bit of dirt and taste it. ■

Don't settle for half.



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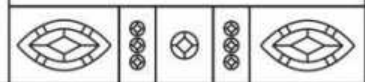


EVERY FATONE, EVERY 1999 ONE EPIC FOUNTAIN



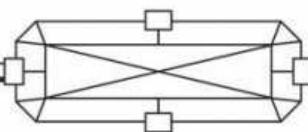
Inside the Greatest
Super Bowl Party Ever

By David Fleming





SUPER BOWL 50



I WOKE A few hours before kickoff with the roof of my mouth coated in a fine analgesic mist of milk chocolate and Jack Daniel's, and with the crumpled pages of a Super Bowl XXXVIII reporter's notebook stuck to my cheek. In that moment, the game itself no longer seemed like such an exciting, exclusive event. Over the past 50 years, in fact, nearly 4 million fans have attended the Super Bowl in person. By comparison, as of that 2004 morning in Houston, less than .003 percent of the U.S. population, or 7,500 people, had ever been granted access to a Playboy Super Bowl party. The night before, I had somehow become one of them, joining a club of mortals who understood, firsthand, why black-market invites to this bash go for twice the cost of a ticket to the actual game.

Rolling over on my lime-green hotel comforter, I held my notebook at arm's length, waiting for the faux-Roman game logo to come into focus, eager to relive what I was pretty sure had been the most glorious, mind-blowing bacchanal in recorded sports history. But it was a dark, antiquated time back then—12 entire years ago, before the ubiquitous presence of cellphone cameras and social media. So I was left, like a caveman, to root around in that notebook for clues. A frantic search revealed but a single two-word entry: Mars. Rover.

Later, as the deserted media bus rolled past the Astrodome on the way to the stadium, my brain finally rolled over like a cold engine. Astros. Space. NASA. Yes! The encrypted Fibonacci sequence I had scribbled to myself the night before suddenly made sense. In the week leading up to the Patriots-Panthers matchup, the news had been filled with incredible dispatches from the Martian surface after the arrival of NASA exploration rovers Spirit and Opportunity.

We had always known of this alien world 141 million miles away, but until the Mars rovers made their journey, no one could say for sure what that planet was like. Now we knew. It was the same way with Playboy's party. I had always suspected that a spectacular alternate universe existed at the Super Bowl. But I never had tangible proof of what that world was like. Now I knew. Now, after selflessly volunteering to be this universe's party rover, I had proof of why every year 1 million people show up to the host city even though most stadiums have only 70,000 seats, and why the actual Super

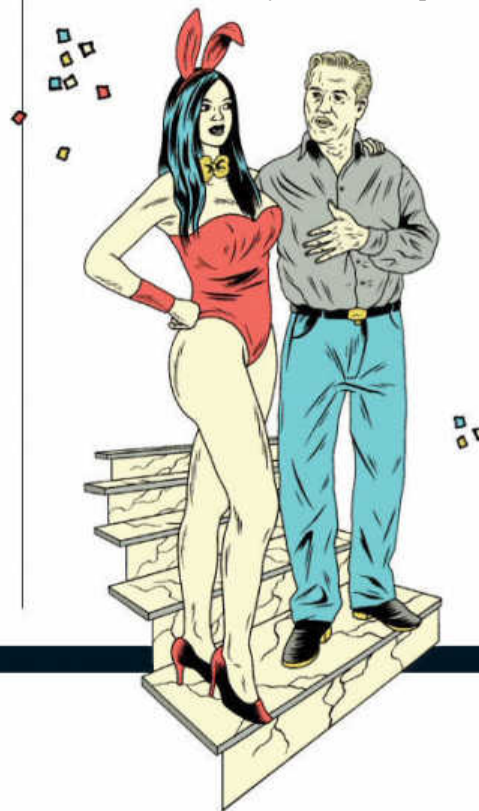
game has become ancillary to the traveling circus that is the Super bash.

All I had to do was remember it.

NO ONE IN the NFL wants to admit this, of course, but the Super Bowl owes a debt of gratitude to the late-1990s renaissance of Hugh Hefner, Playboy's silk-pajama-clad octogenarian founder. In 2000, the publication decided to celebrate its new website with an online-only Playmate halftime show during Super Bowl XXXIV in Atlanta. In the age of dial-up modems, the show was a flop, but the corresponding party, a modest affair held on Super eve at a small club in downtown Atlanta, had fans, celebs and NFL players lined up around the block in an ice storm.

Two years later, in the aftermath of 9/11, Playboy's party at Anne Rice's mansion in New Orleans helped bring the revelry back to our national sports holiday. The party now had major sponsors, dozens of Playmates in attendance, a strong NC-17 vibe and a VIP guest list with 1,000 names on it from every corner of the sports and entertainment worlds. (Hef typically doesn't attend, but his stamp is on everything, including said guest list.) "It really is a Playboy Mansion party relocated," says former NFL wideout Johnnie Morton, who covered the Houston Super Bowl as a TV correspondent for *Extra*. "Once you get into that party, the game itself becomes an afterthought, a comedown."

By 2004, competition was growing from *Maxim* and other publications. Plus, it was Playboy's 50th anniversary. So Donna Tavoso, Playboy's creative services director at the time and the party's brainchild, was forced to step up her game. Armed with Sony PlayStation, Miller and Jack Daniel's as primary sponsors, a budget ballooning past \$500,000 and a staff of 25 dubbed the Party Team, Tavoso started scouting locations in Houston nearly a year before



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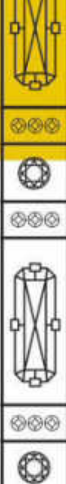


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SUPER BOWL 50



the big day. Soon, she came across The Corinthian, a century-old neoclassical bank building in the lower downtown area. After seeing the building's 23,000-square-foot, two-story atrium, lined by 24 massive, 35-foot-high Corinthian columns, Tavoso—a warm, straight-shooting cross between Melissa McCarthy and Pat Summitt—dreamed up the angel-and-devil theme.

It looked like the kind of place Bruce Wayne would throw a Super Bowl party, and it was one of the last intimate, ornate locales Playboy used before the economy tanked and everyone started unironically housing their soirees in cheap, huge, homogeneous circus tents. We had no way of knowing it at the time, but we were living in the short-lived peak years of the spare-no-expense skin mag parties. Just like everything else Super Bowl-related, the original party scene has since been co-opted and transformed into a slick, comfy corporate cash cow. We'll always have Houston, though. That was a legit, off-the-rails rager.

JOEY FATONE'S MEMORY is fuzzy. "The balcony was 'heaven,' and the lower level was 'hell,'" the former 'N Sync member told me recently. "The rest of the night? Total blur." It's an aftereffect shared by nearly everyone I spoke with, and something that makes Tavoso beam.

See, if Tavoso was the Steve Jobs of those Super Bowl parties, The Corinthian was her Los Altos garage. It was there, in a space that once hosted a state dinner for Queen Elizabeth II, that party staples

we now take for granted—the ice luge, the chocolate fountain, body painting—were invented, implemented and, dare I say, perfected.

Shelby Hodge, an editor at CultureMap, has been covering the social scene in Houston for 25 years. "I've never seen anything like this party before, and I haven't seen anything even remotely close to it since," she says. "Only Playboy and only the Super Bowl could get so many beautiful people to show up in one place in their underwear. It was over-the-top, completely, but somehow elegant, first-class and exclusive all at the same time."

Well, not that exclusive. A handful of us



B
BED HEAD
For Men
TIGI

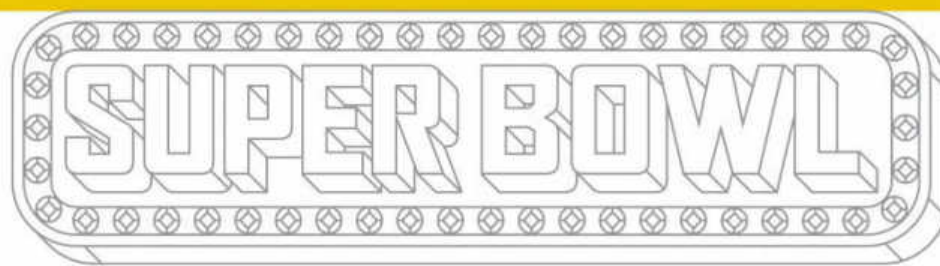
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at ESPN were granted access via special media credentials. But there was no way for the general public to legitimately purchase an invitation. Which means, according to Tavo, that “everyone who gets in is a VIP, and the people who can’t will do absolutely anything to get access to this world.”

At The Corinthian that night in 2004, Houston’s finest were out in force; around 10:45 p.m., the fire marshal was threatening to terminate the shindig if Tavo didn’t cap the flow of guests, right then and there, around 1,500. As crazy as it sounds, moments after I had gained entrance, Aerosmith’s Steven Tyler was

turned away at the door. Tyler, I’m told, accepted his fate graciously, though Fatone swears that much later in the evening he spotted him at the bar. Maybe he sneaked in with the Secret Service; a little later, men with earpieces and Glockes escorted Jenna Bush, George W’s daughter, in through a private entrance. It was no longer just a historic party but a matter of national security.

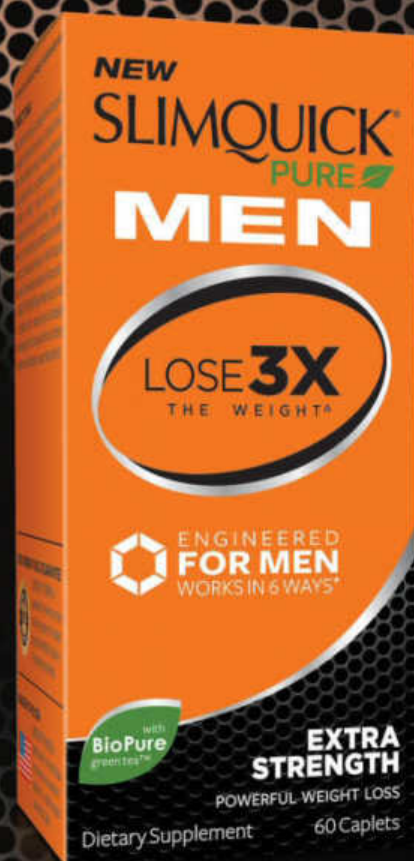
As far as I can tell, the last person to get in before the fire marshal made good on his promise was Jets owner Woody Johnson. A few minutes before 11, a Playboy employee who is a Jets fan and friend of the owner grabbed a security

guard and ran to the edge of the barricades near the VIP entrance. A single tiny hand went up in the back. “Make a hole!” shouted Playboy security, and in Johnson went, practically crowd-surfing to the front of the barricade. “I had a terrific time,” Johnson says.

Things didn’t go quite as smoothly for Jerry Jones, who climbed out of a giant silver tour bus followed by 40 cowbros. The Dallas owner was on the guest list with a plus-four. It was left to Tavo, a die-hard Eagles fan, to break the news to Jones that, alas, the Playboy Super Bowl party was going to go down just like the past 10 Super Bowls: No one from the Cowboys had a shot in hell at getting in. “It was not a happy conversation,” Tavo says. “We argued. He left.”

As she walked back into the party, an athlete leaned over and congratulated her for standing her ground. It was John Rucker.

“Jerry Jones is an icon in the sports world, and we wanted him in the party,” Tavo says. “But there was no way we could take all



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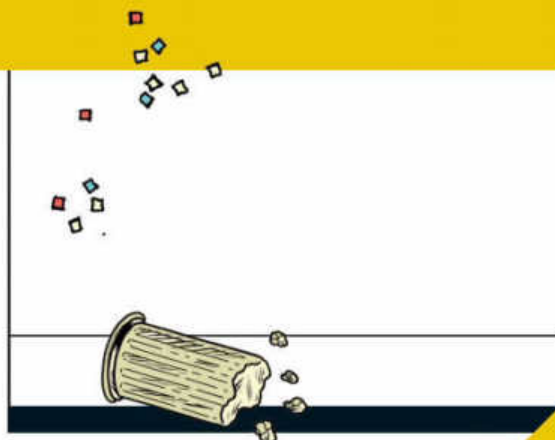
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SUPER-SIZED

FROM GOOD IDEA TO CULTURAL PHENOMENON

700

Approximate number of attendees at the first Super Bowl party in 1967, mostly writers in town to cover the game, according to *When It Was Just a Game*. By contrast, for the 1 million visitors expected in San Francisco, the host committee has 35 free music performances planned at its “fan village.”

those extra people, especially all those extra men, not after all we did to keep the party 50-50.”

Important point: the ladies. See, athletes and celebs tended to leave their significant others at home for the Playboy party. Go figure. So Playboy engaged in something Tavoso calls “girl outreach.” During the week, Playboy staff distributed hundreds of women-only pink tickets that instructed the bearer to be barer: Please wear your most heavenly or devilish lingerie. Playboy also reached out to college campuses around Houston with a kind of reverse Cinderella offer. Deliver 20 to 30 college coeds, 21-and-over and dressed in lingerie, to the doorstep of The Corinthian and they could also enter the party.

“When people first walk in, we want them to have that Disney moment for adults,” Tavoso says. “That feeling of, ‘Oh man, there are Playmates here? And video games? And chocolate? And Jack Daniel’s? And models in body paint? Is that Barry Sanders talking to Cal Ripken and Duran Duran? My head’s going to explode.’”

I remember walking in, being overcome by the kaleidoscope of sights and sounds and needing to grasp a handrail to steady myself. Then, before I had fully regained composure, two models brushed by wearing nothing but paint, and a waiter in a white tux stepped forward with Jack Daniel’s on a tray. Not a drink, an entire bottle. Before me, DJ Shorty, using an old-school turntable and heavy doses of vintage Prince, had the hell-themed dance floor pulsating with an energy that, I’m pretty sure, inspired the Zion orgy dance scene in the final *Matrix*.

Terrell Owens still calls me “some kind of boring” for seeking out the PlayStation area. But upstairs, in heaven, is where I met Stacy Fuson, a lifelong Seahawks fan and Miss February 1999. She was seated on a white velvet love seat, dressed in a shiny silver bunny

costume. When Fuson saw me eyeing the PlayStation console, she patted the cushion next to her, challenging me to what turned out to be an embarrassingly lopsided game of Madden. “Sorry about that,” Fuson said when we caught up over the phone recently. “I try to warn guys; I’m pretty good at that game.”

Before I could offer an excuse or hit the reset button, a buddy of mine walked up to the love seat and stood there with a blank look on his face. Nestled in his arms like a newborn was a giant bowl of marshmallows covered in chocolate. His voice trembled with the awe and wonder of a 1,000-angel choir when he finally gasped, “There’s ... there’s ... a giant chocolate fountain downstairs.”

You want to know what that Playboy Super Bowl party was like? You’re in the middle of playing Madden against a centerfold, and your best friend walks up and informs you that downstairs, past the Jack Daniel’s ice luge and the models wearing paint, and just beyond the VIP area—where Jerry Cantrell, Pharrell, Jeff Gordon, John Elway, Jaime Pressly and the president’s daughter are all hanging out, where Simon Le Bon keeps asking everyone whether they’re excited for the big “football” game and Run DMC’s Darryl McDaniels is sporting either a Patriots or a Giants jersey, but it’s hard to tell because he keeps lifting it to expose his left nipple, for some reason—past all these bucket-list items and down a flight of stairs, there is an effing real-life Willy Wonka river of chocolate. If a unicorn carrying Bill Belichick and Paris Hilton had galloped by, I wouldn’t have blinked

an eye. I turned to Fuson, who’d already read my mind. “Go,” she said. “Go.”

“Guys turn into teenage boys at these parties—it’s very endearing, for the most part,” Fuson says. “The chocolate fountain? That was honestly like the highlight of the party. I wanted to hang out there all night too.”

So off I went on what can only be described as a Homeric journey through Hef’s circles of heaven and hell. For the next few hours, I pinballed around the party, unable to find the fountain, distracted by the siren song of the drinks, the dance floor and the odd coupling of celebs like Jimmy Fallon, Da Brat and Bill O’Reilly mingling freely with the common folk. Finally, as the night closed in on 2 a.m., the sea of revelers began to thin out, and there, in the distance, it appeared: the giant chocolate fountain. I put my head down and wended my way through the crowd until I was close enough to smell the confectionery. But when I looked up, oh, the horror: By this late in the evening, the party people were cupping their hands and drinking from the gigantic fountain like lost desert hikers who had stumbled upon a fresh mountain stream.

“We all walked into that party, saw the chocolate fountain and thought the same thing: ‘Oh, that’s so cool,’” Fatone says. “But four hours later, after a few drinks, everyone’s hands and fingers were in the fountain, like animals. I remember thinking, ‘All control is lost.’”

I’m pretty sure I went right ahead and guzzled from it anyway. When would I ever get back to Mars? ■





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SUPER BOWL CONFIDENTIAL

In our poll of 304* NFL players, we covered the full spectrum: Which team will compete for the most Lombardi trophies in the next 10 years—and which QB should have that hardware already? Players dished on which back they want with the ball on the 1-yard line (Pete Carroll, avert your eyes) and whether a title is worth a shorter career. Read on as the NFL's best make their Super Bowl picks.

Fourth quarter of the Super Bowl, one throw into the end zone to win it: Which quarterback do you want making the pass?

TOM BRADY
44%

Which current player would you most like to have on your team in a Super Bowl?

Tom Brady 20%
J.J. Watt 11%
Adrian Peterson 5%
Calvin Johnson 5%

Which team will make the most Super Bowl appearances in the next 10 years?

Patriots 27%
Packers 13%
Panthers 12%
Seahawks 10%

Fourth quarter of the Super Bowl, one play left from the 1-yard line: Which running back do you want carrying the ball?

Marshawn Lynch 36%
Adrian Peterson 35%
Todd Gurley 3%
Jonathan Stewart 3%



Which current QB did you think would've won a Super Bowl by now?

PHILIP RIVERS 31%

Carson Palmer 15% Tony Romo 12% Andrew Luck 12%

Which current coach did you think would've won a Super Bowl by now?

MARVIN LEWIS 19%

Andy Reid 18% Rex Ryan 14% John Fox 14%

"CAM NEWTON"

THREE NFL PLAYERS NAMED THE CAROLINA QB AS THEIR GOAL-LINE "RUNNING BACK" OF CHOICE.

If you were offered a deal to trim three years off the end of your career in exchange for one Super Bowl win, would you take it?

YES 61%

ILLUSTRATIONS BY ROBERT BALL



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DADS TAKE



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COUGHING, SNIFFLING,
ACHING, SNEEZING,
FEVER, COUGHING,
SORE THROAT, ACHING,
STUFFY HEAD, FEVER,
CHEST CONGESTION, STUFFY HEAD,
**NO SICK DAYS, BEST SLEEP WITH A COLD,
MEDICINE. MEDICINE.**



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LORDS OF THE RINGS?

When *The Mag's* NFL Confidential polled current players on which QB will take home the most trophies this decade, Aaron Rodgers claimed the top spot. Then we asked *SportsCenter* anchors Linda Cohn and Kevin Negandhi—and let's just say Cohn, ahem, disagrees.



Which quarterback will win the most Super Bowls in the next 10 years?

Aaron Rodgers 20%
Cam Newton 18%
Tom Brady 16%
Andrew Luck 14%
Russell Wilson 10%

AARON RODGERS, THE TOP PICK? SOME DON'T MIND IT ... OTHERS FIND IT DOWNRIGHT MIND-BOGGLING.

LINDA COHN: Would I be shocked if Cam Newton wins a Super Bowl in the next 10 years? No. Would I be shocked if Andrew Luck does? No. Aaron Rodgers, would I be shocked if he wins another one? Yes, I would be. I really would.

KEVIN NEGANDHI: See, I think Rodgers has two more in him. To me, he's at peak stage.

LC: I don't agree with you. First off, he's 32 years old. His post-season record is, ya know, as we speak it's barely above .500. I don't think he has the components on his team from year to year, and I don't think he makes those around him better as much as Tom Brady does.

UNLIKE CAM NEWTON, WHO CAME IN SECOND ...

KN: Cam Newton changed Ted Ginn Jr.'s career. He's made so many guys around him better.

LC: À la Brady.

KN: Exactly. And that's what

separates Newton from everybody else in this discussion. When he is on the field, you know he will transcend the offense to another level. You put any other quarterback in that Carolina offense, they're not making Ginn or Jerricho Cotchery catch multiple touchdowns in a game.

LC: I agree. He has a better upside as we move forward.

BUT IS HE AS PROMISING AS ... 38-YEAR-OLD TOM BRADY?

LC: He will win at least two more Super Bowls in the next decade. For me, Tom Brady should be No. 1 on this list.

KN: What kind of window are you giving him to play in? Three years? Four?

LC: I think he can play until he's at least 45. I really do, Kevin.

ANDREW LUCK? HE CAME IN FOURTH, BUT HE'S A MYSTERY.

KN: To me, the most fascinating thing is, where would Andrew Luck be on this list if you posed this question before the season?

LC: That team was a sexy pick to

get to the Super Bowl this year. Now look at them.

KN: Those injuries. Man, he gets hit a lot.

LC: His career is so young, but he's injury-prone, as we've found out. I don't like those signs. But if the Colts' management figures out that, "Hey, Luck is our Powerball ticket, we have to protect him" ... then he'll be right up there with Cam Newton.

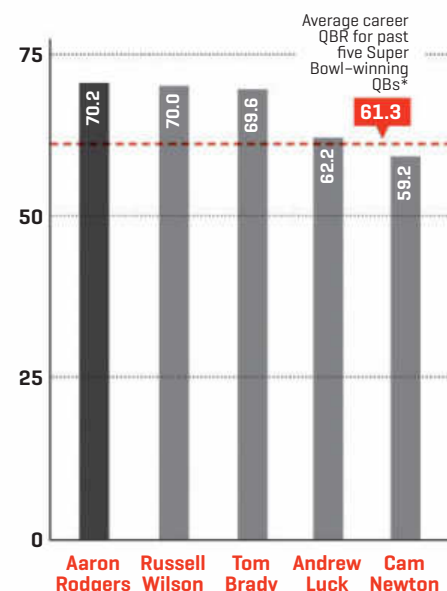
JUST DON'T COUNT OUT RUSSELL WILSON.

LC: Why doesn't he get the recognition he deserves? I know what you're going to say. "Oh, Linda, it's because it's all about defense in Seattle." No. Russell Wilson will make a play when his team needs it most, and he won't cough up the ball.

KN: I'm in complete agreement. You look at Cam, you look at Luck, people talk about their potential. Russell Wilson has proved it already! He'll find a way, regardless of weapons. I think he'll win two more Super Bowls in the next 10 years.

—INTERVIEW BY ANTHONY OLIVIERI

CAREER QBR FOR THE TOP FIVE VOTE-GETTERS IN NFL CONFIDENTIAL'S POLL



*Includes each quarterback's QBR in the years prior to and including his Super Bowl-winning season. QBR values available starting in 2006.

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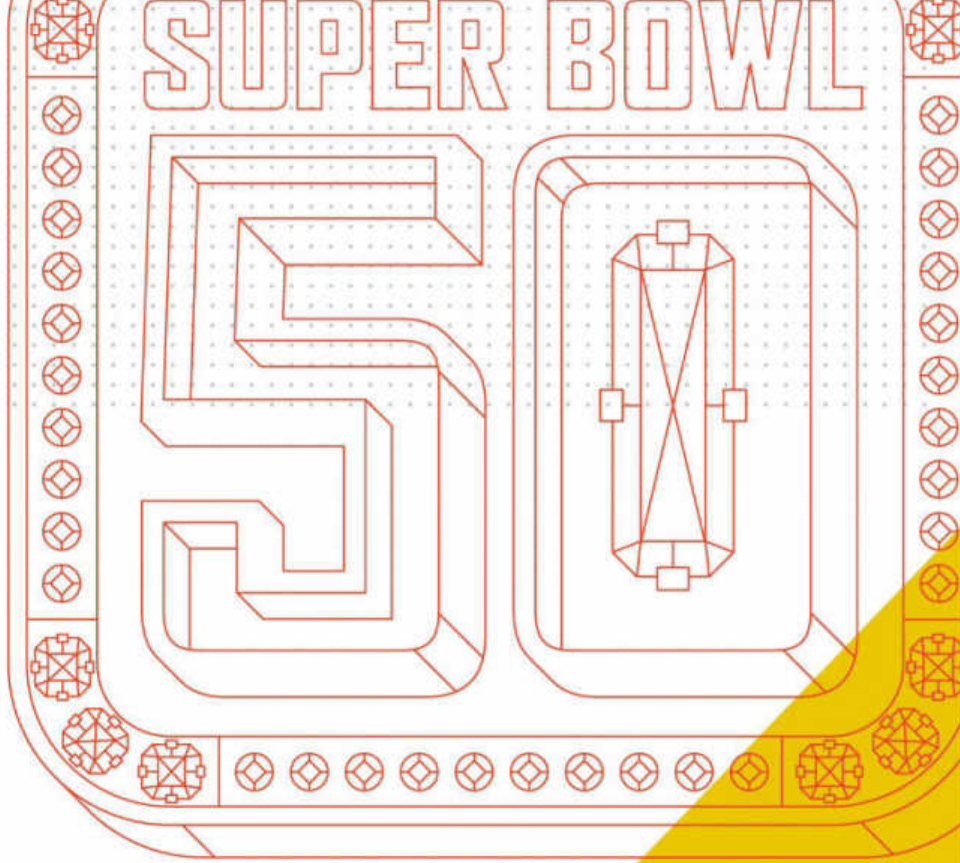
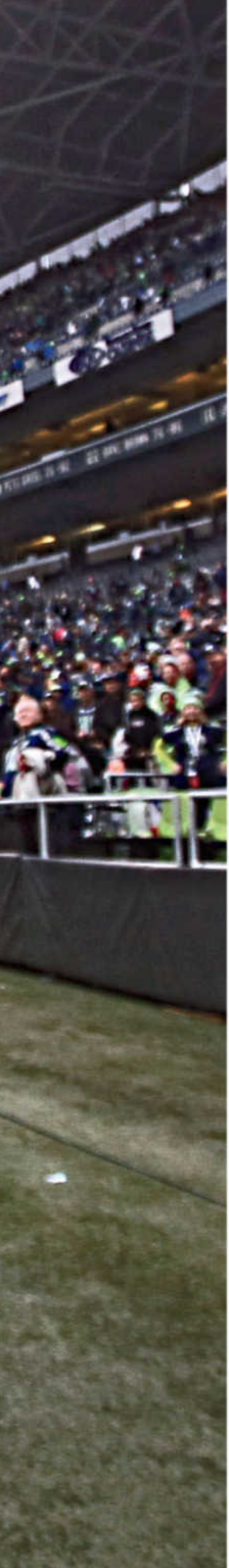
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Try to avoid water higher than the bottom of the hubs and proceed slowly. Refer to your owner's manual for detailed information regarding driving through water.





THE JOY OF CAM NEWTON

His play has irked traditionalists, invigorated a city and reshaped the game. And when he takes on the Broncos in Super Bowl 50 on Feb. 7, you can bet not even his haters will be able to look away.

By Tim Keown



H



His son had a tendency to speak a bit too much in class. The boy liked attention, which caused a problem for his teachers and—by extension—his parents. So one day, Cecil Newton had an idea. He told his son, “Cam, since you want people to notice you, you can dress up on Fridays. That way, everybody will notice you.”

Starting the next Friday, Cam Newton left the house for middle school wearing a long-sleeve button-down, slacks and dress shoes. He did it without complaint, almost cheerfully, and before long the practice wasn’t restricted to Fridays.

“He’s enjoying this,” Cecil told his wife, Jackie.

CAM NEWTON IS enjoying this NFL season in a way that makes some people proud and others lose their minds. He is nearly a caricature of happiness, smiling when we have been conditioned to expect aggression, laughing when we expect seriousness. The default response to success in a game of rage and combat is belligerence: an angry pose or a violent firing of the ball into the turf. And yet here is the rarest of men: one who can throw his body into a snarling pile of large humans—all gunning for him with malicious intent—and emerge on the other side with a radioactive grin and a first down.

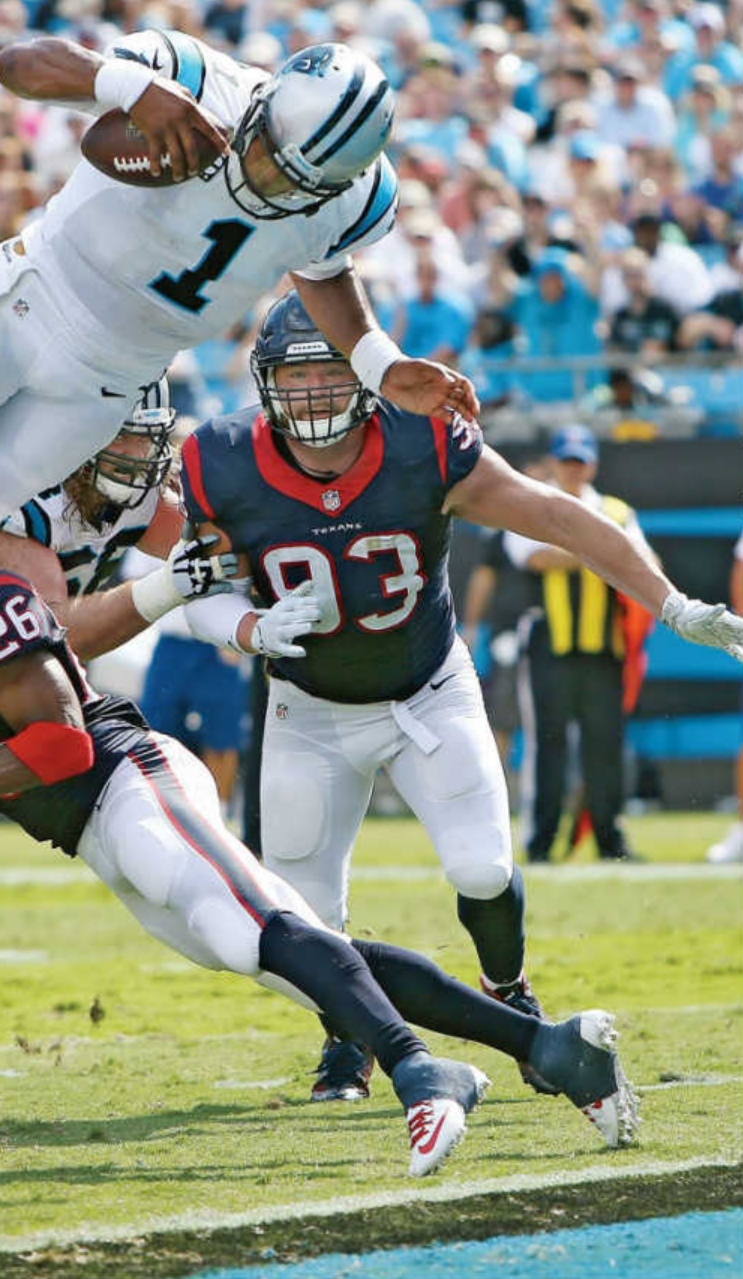
So at this point maybe you’re wondering whether there’s anything that *hasn’t* been said about Cam Newton. Fair point.

He’s so well-known nationally that he’s been charged with the unenviable task of making yogurt look cool. He is going to be the MVP over Teflon Tom Brady—a fact cherished by some as near historical, derided by others as close to chimerical, and validated utterly by his playoff performance. His post-touchdown dances have spawned overwrought, what-will-we-tell-the-children letters to the editor. He is—and has been—viewed endlessly through lenses of maturity, greed and race. So yeah, you probably have an opinion of the guy.

But then again, there’s an honest-to-god foxtail hanging from the front left pocket of his pants, he named his son Chosen and he appears to have absolutely no interest in being ordinary ever. He color-coordinates his chewing gum—Carolina blue—to the Panthers’ team colors and wore shoes in the NFC championship game factory-inscribed with the names of his

teammates. He stands at his postgame news conference with purple shoes one week, swirling black-and-white the next. “I don’t know where he gets those shoes,” says his father, Cecil. “Really, I have absolutely no idea.”

Cam plays football as if he owns the entire field, every single blade of it. As the Falcons were being introduced at Atlanta’s Georgia Dome before the Panthers’ only loss, in Week 16, Newton stood just beyond the tunnel formed by cheerleaders and band, almost close enough to be singed by two cylinders of flame in the end zone. No other Panthers teammate or coach was near him, and he stood tall and still, an infantry line of photographers crouched at his feet. He stared at each Atlanta player as the Falcons waited for their names to be announced, as if making sure his 6-foot-5, 245-pound body was the first thing they saw as they prepared to play the game.



Superman takes off! Newton's 10 rushing TDs this season led all quarterbacks.

"I don't know why he does that," says backup quarterback Derek Anderson. "I see it, but I haven't figured it out. I guess because he can?"

You could be angered by this. Your call. It wouldn't take much to perceive it as an affront to the old and phlegmy norms dictating respect and humility on the field of competition. And if you lean in that direction and *aren't* offended, fear not. Chances are there's another opportunity on its way.

In the second quarter against the Falcons, after an inspiring, borderline-reckless 1-on-11 run for 8 yards and a first down, Newton took a walk through the Falcons' secondary. He was in no hurry—the officials called for a measurement, which was accompanied by the obligatory eight commercials, and Newton seemed to have a maestro's feel for the game's staccato rhythms. The message behind the walk, conscious or not: *I'm going to*

get here soon enough, so I might as well check it out first.

These are the actions that try men's souls. "Some teams get offended when he does stuff," Anderson says. "He made a good point: If you don't want to watch me dance, do something about it. But then again, when he said that, it was another thing for people to take offense to." Anderson laughs at the absurdity of Life With Cam. It's like the Old Testament: Something is always begetting something else. There is a Panthers staffer who occasionally comes to the sideline between drives and takes off Newton's skullcap, replacing it with a towel. Cam sits on the bench, paying no attention as the guy goes about his business like a waiter refilling a glass. Hall of Fame quarterback Warren Moon, a friend and mentor of Newton's, says, "When people get upset about the towel, I tell them, 'Relax, he's only wearing it because it says 'Gatorade' on it.'"

And then, inevitably, Cam will score, at which point the hyperventilation reaches Peak Cam. This happens often—10 times while running this season, 35 by passing, regular-season numbers nobody has ever reached, and his touchdown celebrations are three-act plays that straddle the never-before-straddled line between Figaro and Monty Python. Against the Cardinals in the NFC championship, for instance, he sneaked in from the 1, and the word "sneak"—diminutive to begin with—has never felt more inadequate. There is nothing *sneaky* about him. It is a Quarterback Surge, and as he pops up to begin whatever might happen next, it's not unreasonable to believe that the touchdowns have become secondary to what follows.

"Some people don't know how to take it because he's not your prototypical, white, dropback passer," says Anderson, who is all three. "He doesn't do things exactly the

way people have done it at the position for the past 50 years, and some people get offended. That's on them for not having an open mind."

IN CHARLOTTE'S BANK of America Stadium, the pre-touchdown anticipation is quite a thing. As the Panthers get closer to the end zone, an energy builds—everyone wants to be *in* on it, *in* on Cam, *in* on whatever he decides might come next. He always gives the ball to a child in the stands, which (of course) is seen by some as charming and (of course) by others as calculating. There's no doubting what the kids think: They come streaming toward the end zone, Kuechly jerseys and Olsen jerseys and mostly Newton jerseys racing out of their seats and bounding down the aisle like skiers on a hill.

After the first of two rushing touchdowns against the Buccaneers in Week 17, Newton ran to the right corner of the end zone and gave the ball to a kid who may or may not have been sitting anywhere near that spot, and then he ran airplane-swoop-style across the back of the end zone, 54 yards from one side of the field to the other, where he left-turned it up the Panthers' sideline and gathered speed to do this Euro-step/jump-shot routine with teammates Joe Webb and Anderson—"We don't have a name for it," Anderson says—before making his way to the bench.

No dance. No pose. No semaphoric nod to Superman.

Sedate, for him.

A two-alarm celebration.

And while Moon dislikes the celebrations—"I like that he gives the ball to a kid," he says, "but I think the quarterback gets enough attention already"—Cecil Newton says, "People go so far as to time his celebrations. They're *timing* him. They'll say, '4.1 seconds is the norm, and he took it to 8.3.' If you're that scientifically



SUPER BOWL 50



SUPER BOWL 50

concerned with a celebration, you have bigger problems than whatever he's doing."

And *that's* the crux of the whole thing. The sclerotic responses to a young man's smile, the granular dissections of each dance move, the people timing his celebrations—it all stems from a simple fact: Newton is taking a position associated with stern reserve and muted shows of excitement and turning it into Carnival. He's not a quarterback; he's a Rorschach test.

ON SEVERAL FEBRUARY days in 2011, four students sat before Cam Newton in a classroom at the University of California at San Diego: two boys with a limited knowledge of football, a girl with none and a boy who had played in high school. They were employees of the athletic department, kids who picked up a few extra bucks and an athletic department polo to referee Ultimate Frisbee intramurals. Each sat before Newton with a notebook and an assignment: Understand the intricacies of an NFL play based on what you're taught by the large man at the front of the room.

"You're the professor, Cam," said George Whitfield Jr., Newton's predraft quarterbacks coach. "I'll know how much you know by what they turn in."

Cecil Newton wanted two words—*athlete* and *raw*—stricken from his son's record. "Leave no stone unturned," Cecil told Whitfield after he listened to Warren Moon and ignored nearly everyone else by hiring a (then-)relatively unknown quarterbacks guru to train his son.

Whitfield breaks down the NFL's predraft Kabuki into three parts: 1) *The Runway*—whether you look the part in the NFL's fashion show; 2) *The Résumé*—what you've accomplished; and 3) *The Campaign*—the buzz swirling around you.

Cecil Newton enlisted Moon and Whitfield, two black former quarterbacks (Whitfield played at Division II Tiffin University and in the Arena League) who knew the uniqueness of Cam's campaign. "Whitfield," Cecil told him, "I'm either going to be a genius or a jackass for hiring you."

It's Whitfield's contention that football has 21 positions and the office of the quarterback. It's fine for a wide receiver to know his assignment and nothing else, but not a quarterback. Before he put Newton in front of the classroom, Whitfield told him, "I know you know what you're supposed to do, but that's not enough: You need to bring them with you on this."

And so those four students found themselves sitting there in front of a Heisman Trophy winner, taking notes.

LATE IN THE third quarter against the Buccaneers, in a game that had been decided long before, Newton threw a pass to receiver Brenton Bersin, who got a first down, fought for yardage and

ended up losing the ball when it was stripped by Lavonte David.

After the fumble, Bersin moved with his teammates along the sideline in the ectoplasmic horde, trying to lose himself in the humanity. Nobody acknowledged him, probably out of sympathy, until one large man grabbed him by the arm.

"Keep doing that," Newton told Bersin. "Keep being you. Keep making plays and fighting."

Bring them with you. Earlier in the game, Webb recovered a fumbled punt and returned it to the Bucs' 3-yard line. He stood up after being tackled and almost immediately found himself face-to-face with Newton, who was jumping up and down and running onto the field almost before Webb was tackled.

"I thought we were going to get a penalty," Webb says. "When I saw him, my first thought was, 'What are you doing out here?'"

What is he doing out there? Or maybe the question should be: What *isn't* he doing out there? Or: What is he doing *everywhere?*—standing a few steps outside the Falcons' intro line, bombing onto the field during punt coverage, strolling through the opposing secondary after a first down.

There comes a point in every Cam Newton story where the obligatory must be said, and this time it's courtesy of Panthers defensive back Cortland Finnegan: "He's a big kid out there. You can't take what he does personally. You just can't. It's who he is. You watch him and realize he's having a great time, and no game is too big for him."

It's quite different from the whispers that followed him into the league. That he sometimes sulked as the Panthers went 6–10 and 7–9 his first two seasons. That he alienated teammates by lifting weights by himself. (During his two years at Florida, he lifted with the defensive

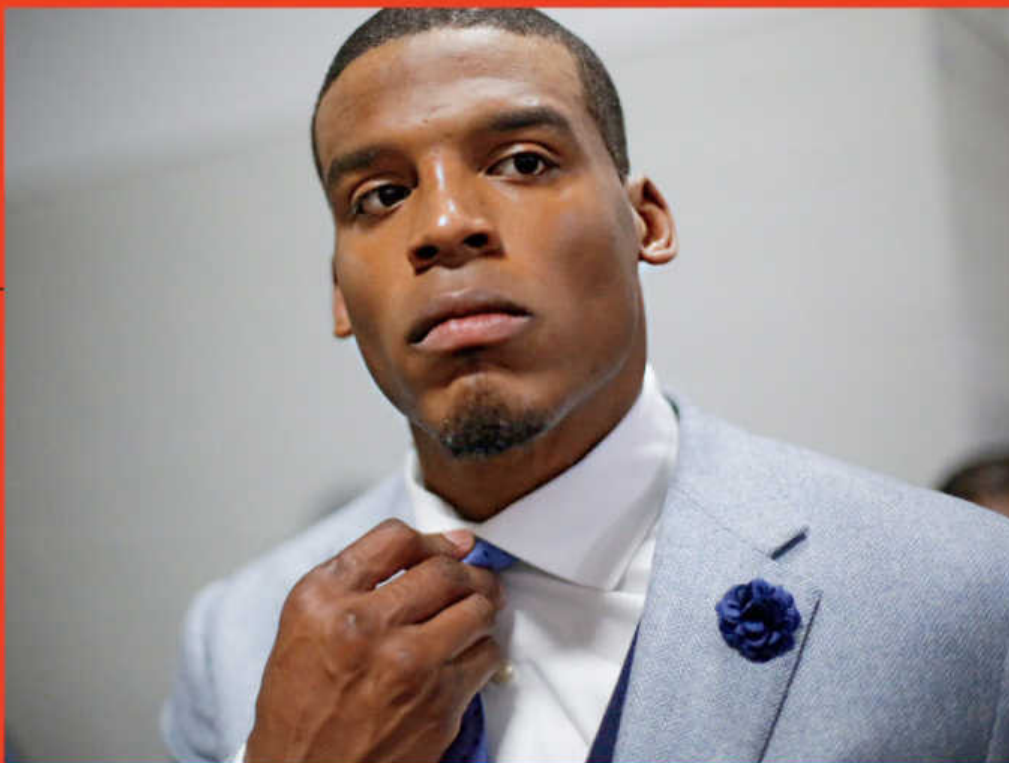
linemen.) That he put up great numbers but hadn't yet mastered the art of bringing them with him. That he was, in Whitfield's terminology, playing the position but not occupying the office.

Football players are notoriously and probably unnecessarily leery of dealing in specifics. Even the most laudatory comments are general ("He can really hit receivers in tight windows") or intentionally vague ("He's got a good feel for the game"). But when Anderson discusses Newton, it's obvious he has to pull himself back. He wants to lay it all out; he just knows he can't. And so he discusses Newton's transformation from a quarterback who follows directions to one who gives them. "Sometimes he'll see something and I'm like, 'Damn, how did he come up with that?'" Against the Bucs, Newton told quarterbacks coach Ken Dorsey he wanted to make a slight change to the receivers' routes when faced with a certain coverage—"It was something we hadn't worked on for weeks," Anderson says—and within a series it was creating confusion in the Bucs' secondary on a day when Newton completed 21 of 26 passes.

"The first couple of years, when we'd come to play Cam, we knew he was a big, strong, athletic quarterback," says Finnegan, who has played with three other teams in his 10-year career. "As a secondary, we'd say, 'Well, he's not very accurate; he's not comfortable in the pocket yet.' But now? To see him in person *now*? It's night and day. It's like—*wow!*"

THE CONVERSATION WAS rattling around the SUV the night before Newton's pro day at Auburn. He was taking his father, Whitfield and Moon on a tour: the campus, the football facility, his favorite barbecue joint. The next day—March 8, 2011—would be the day to cement his spot as the No. 1 pick, and the car couldn't hold his enthusiasm.

All stats through regular season. OBR rankings are out of 33 qualified quarterbacks.



Newton was groomed for the league, but this season he found his own style.

“YOU CAN’T TAKE WHAT HE DOES PERSONALLY. YOU JUST CAN’T. IT’S WHO HE IS.”

CORTLAND FINNEGAN, PANTHERS DB

started it back up. He threw at the combine, rare for a top quarterback.

He knew where the eyes were trained. His one year at Auburn was dogged by an NCAA eligibility investigation that centered on claims that Cecil Newton and a former Mississippi State player shopped Cam to the Bulldogs for a price in the \$150,000 range. The 13-month probe ended with the NCAA finding no violations, but that didn’t stop NFL teams from sending private investigators to Auburn to speak to food service workers, frat boys and sorority girls. They spoke to bartenders, even though Newton has never touched alcohol. “The worst thing they found?” Whitfield says. “Sometimes he rode his scooter without a helmet.”

The next year, Robert Griffin III had a DJ playing music—some of it sung by RG3 himself—at his Baylor pro day. Imagine for a moment if Cam Newton, fresh off his national championship/Heisman Trophy season but hounded by those associating him with a lack of desire, maturity and leadership qualities, had shown up at his pro day with a DJ. *He* might be playing in Canada.

“There was a heavy cloud and a lot of pressure heaped upon Cam,” Cecil Newton says, his voice like a flare in the night sky. “A lot of NFL pundits were advising teams to stay away from the guy for character reasons. There was this whole attitude of him supposedly not wanting to be a leader. They said he’d get money and flop like the rest of them. I know how I’m built and how I helped build my son. I knew it was as far from

the 2007 draft. Michael Vick had spent 21 months in prison.

If Russell’s *only* sin had been ineffective quarterbacking, maybe Newton would have had less of a burden to bear. But not only was Russell bad, he was lazy, more interested in clubs than craft. There had been many, many draft busts before him, but Russell’s failure so enraged the league that it created a rookie salary structure to protect its teams from any future JaMarcus Russells.

Cam Newton was not JaMarcus Russell, and he was not Vince Young, but they rode shotgun, like cackling demons he was forced to exorcise. “Cam didn’t want the stereotypes to stick to him, so he did everything right,” Finnegan says. “All those stereotypes were gleaming right in his face, but he chose to put in the work to get rid of them.”

There are videos of Whitfield and Newton on high school and college fields in San Diego, working on the most granular aspects of throwing a football. Cam pointing his left toe at the target, Cam waiting to thread the ball through the only open window when two dummy defenders move to close the one that came before, Cam dancing around cones with helium-light feet while keeping his eyes downfield. Whitfield likes to repeat the words of 49ers offensive coordinator Geep Chryst, who says quarterbacking is like *Jeopardy!*: You not only have to be right, you have to be right *fast*.

“No doubt Cam’s the guy who paved the way,” says Webb, a quarterback who also returns kicks and has played receiver. “He made it easier for that next guy, and the guy after that. Coming after JaMarcus Russell, he set the tone. Hey, we can not only be great players, we can be great quarterbacks.”

Newton’s task entering the league was to do everything right: speak right, dress right, train right. It came naturally. “His pride will never let you discount him,” Whitfield says. Still, it had to be a stated plan. He couldn’t get away with being just polite in his interviews, or deferential to power or conservative in his dress. He had to be beyond reproach. He wore a button-down shirt, a sweater vest and khakis on Jon Gruden’s *QB Camp* show. He kept his shoes tied and his shirt tucked in from the moment he parked his car at a practice field to the moment he

SHOW YOUR PRIDE IN THE TIDE.



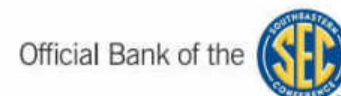
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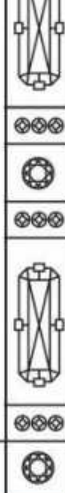
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PANTHERS VS. BRONCOS

HOW THEY MATCH UP

With all due respect to Mr. Newton, the defenses will also be center stage in Santa Clara: The Broncos and Panthers are No. 1 and No. 2 in ESPN's defensive efficiency metric, which measures a team's per-play contribution to its scoring margin. Really, the only questionable unit in this game is the Denver offense: When Peyton Manning was on the field during the regular season, Denver turned the ball over 18 times. That's bad news against a Panthers D that forced a turnover on a league-best 19.4 percent of drives and allowed 17 points or fewer in eight of its games this season [tied for third best]. The wild card for Denver? The Broncos' six defensive/special teams TDs [tied for second overall], which helped swing the result in four games this season.

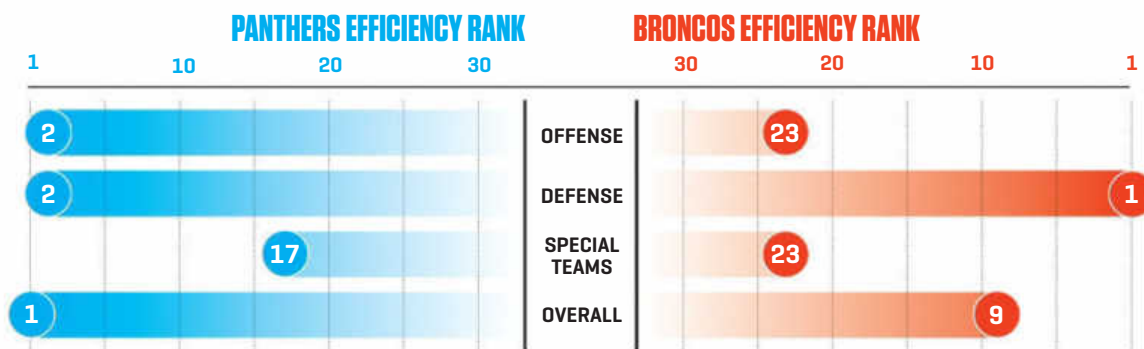
the truth as you could get."

The cloud stretched across the South. Newton left Florida after an incident involving the purchase of a stolen laptop (the charges were dropped after he completed community service and a pretrial program) and rumors of academic impropriety. Before the draft, NFL Network analyst Mike Mayock cautioned against taking Newton with the No. 1 pick, saying, "It's just this gut feeling I have that I don't know how great he wants to be." And, "Something tells me he'll be content to be a multimillionaire who's pretty good." And, "I think the kid is smart enough. I just don't know if he cares enough."

During an interview with a team psychologist of an AFC North team at the combine, Newton was asked whether he sees himself more as a cat or a dog. When he suggested that the question was not relevant and that he saw himself more as a human being, he was immediately asked whether he had a problem with authority.

"African-American quarterbacks get analyzed in ways that others don't," Moon says. "We've dispelled a lot of those myths, but not all."

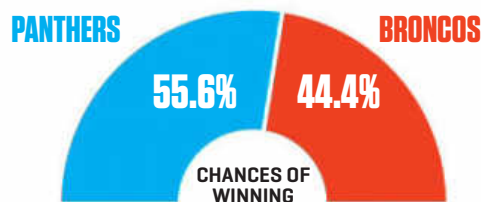
As a professional, he has never appeared in a police blotter. He does an amount of charity work that even a cynic must concede is impressive. In the offseason, he fulfilled a promise he made to his mother and returned to Auburn to finish a degree in sociology. It's the kind of CV that generally revs the mythmaking machine. And yet after the Panthers won at Tennessee, a Nashville mother wrote a letter to *The Charlotte Observer* that reached Peak What-Will-We-Tell-the-Children. Addressed directly to Newton, the letter complained about "chest puffs" and "pelvic thrusts" that were so egregious, she was left with no choice but to divert her 9-year-old daughter's gaze to the Titans' cheerleaders, apparently because nothing restores purity and



THE FPI PREDICTION: PANTHERS BY 1.8 POINTS

Will Peyton Manning get his elusive second title? Or will Cam Newton dab his way into a new era? According to ESPN's Football Power Index, which considers each team's strengths, as well as several other factors, get ready for a classic, with the Panthers eking it out.

QBR RANK
CAM NEWTON
9TH
66.1
TOTAL QBR



QBR RANK
PEYTON MANNING
28TH
45.0
TOTAL QBR



**THE MOST EXTREME COMPETITORS
ON THE MOUNTAIN THIS WINTER
WON'T BE PART OF THE GAMES.**

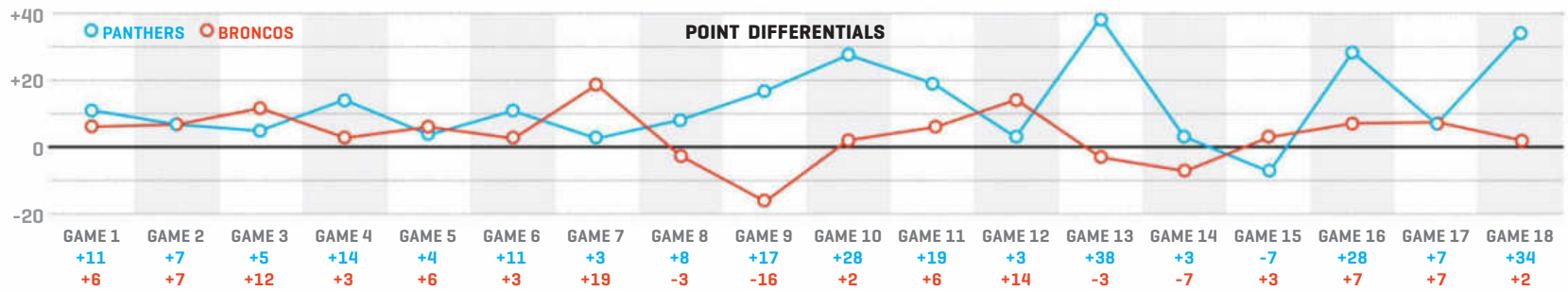
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AMERICA'S
NAVY

HOW THEY GOT HERE

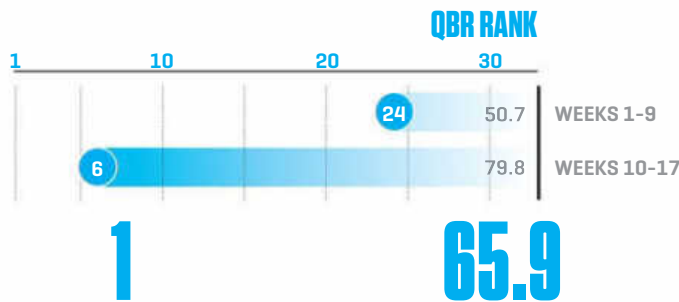
The Panthers obliterated the competition this season, posting a league-best average point differential of 12. The cardiac Broncos, meanwhile, won just three games in the regular season by double digits. That was the lowest number of any team to make the playoffs.



TREND WATCH

PANTHERS QB PLAY

After Week 9, Newton dramatically increased his efficiency and decreased his turnovers, causing his QBR to jump from 50.7 to 79.8. The Panthers, in turn, more than doubled their scoring margin [from plus-7.9 per game to plus-16.1].

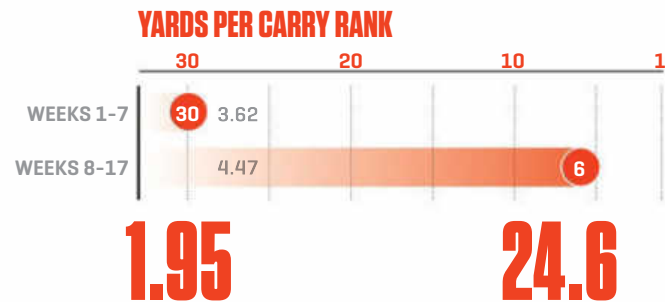


After nine picks in his first eight games (T25), Newton threw just one in his final eight, best in the NFL.

After Week 9, Newton completed 65.9 percent of his passes, a huge jump from his 53.7 mark before that.

BRONCOS RUN GAME

In their first six games, the Broncos had just four rushes of 15 yards or more. Only five teams were worse. But then, from Weeks 8 to 17, they hit on 20 such runs, tied for second overall. Seven went for scores, crushing the NFL average of 1.3 over that time.



After Week 7, Denver's backs started churning out major yards after first contact [1.95, third overall].

In Weeks 1-7, Denver scored a TD once every 70.5 rushes [28th best]. Since? Every 24.6 rushes [fifth].

innocence quite like half-naked women gyrating in support of professional athletes.

"The lady writing the deal about his dancing?" Anderson says, shaking his head. "To me, that was racist. That was flat-out racist, the most close-minded thing you could say."

Does any other athlete have the power to incite such sclerosis? Or to defuse it? Because the letter writer, Rosemary Plorin, backtracked after Newton publicly apologized for offending her while continuing to profess allegiance to the basic tenets of having fun. "I am sorry I didn't understand him better until this week," Plorin wrote.

"Here's what people don't understand," Whitfield says. "If Cam was a bank teller, on a wall somewhere in that bank he'd be employee of the month for March, April, May—something weird would have happened in June, and he'd be back on the wall for July. It wouldn't be about the recognition or the awards, it would be, 'I'm going to be the most outstanding person in this bank, and this bank is going to be the best bank in the neighborhood.'"

THEY WERE STILL driving around Auburn—Cecil, Whitfield, Moon, Cam and his brother CJ—when someone from the Buffalo Bills called. It was late afternoon, and several of the team's decision

makers wanted to have dinner with Cam.

"What do you have to wear?" Moon asked.

"I've got my dark UnderArmour sweatsuit or my gray UnderArmour sweatsuit," Cam said.

Nobody said anything, and by this point he knew what the silence meant. You can't give in; you can't give them what they expect. He had to fight the campaign, and that meant being better dressed and better prepared and better mannered than anyone who came before him.

"You think I should wear something different?" he asked.

"You might want to make this more formal," Moon said.

Cam had no objection.

And so the five guys drove to the mall, in a hurry. Cecil quarterbacked, jotting down sizes and assigning himself the job of finding a shirt. He told CJ to find a pair

of slacks. Moon was told to look for a tie. Cam and Whitfield were in charge of shoes and socks.

Within minutes, Cecil held up a light blue shirt, and CJ walked around with a pair of navy slacks, and Warren got a tie, and from across the men's department Cecil gave a thumbs-up to the shoes and socks. Less than an hour later, Newton walked into the restaurant and shook hands with the Bills' decision makers, looking like he was interviewing for a job at an investment bank.

HE RARELY CONSENTS to interviews, choosing to do only the league-mandated postgame, midweek and network-TV spots, indicating there are levels of fame to which he is not willing to ascend. (Either that or Slightly Mysterious Fame, set against the backdrop of society's demand for overexposure, is its own

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From dabbing to baby naming, Newton's moves are endlessly scrutinized. But no one is having more fun.

accelerant.) He cannot accede to any of the countless one-on-one interview requests, the Panthers say, lest he feel obligated to accede to them all. Everywhere but on the field, he plays the fetishized role assigned to him by *The Office*. He speaks in complete, rote sentences calculated to shine the least light on whatever topic he is addressing.

You can't give them what they expect. In many ways, the campaign can never end. As Cecil says, "There's an audience waiting for him to lose so they can say, 'Now's our time to talk. He's had his time, now it's our turn.' We already know that's out there."

All those Employee of the Month photos lining the wall, and guess what: Something weird *did* happen. On Dec. 30, Cam announced the birth of his first child, the boy he named Chosen. The mother, Kia Proctor, was described by Newton as his "longtime girlfriend." The announcement, made six days after the boy was born, hit the front page of the local papers (of course) and occasioned another finger-wagging letter to *The Charlotte Observer* (of course). Patricia Broderick of Mooresville expressed her disappointment in Newton and suggested he marry the mother of his child. "Congratulations would be in order," she wrote, "if he had been man enough to marry the mother of his child and make a home."

Well, of course she said that. Tom Brady can have a child out of wedlock—and leave the actress/mother for a supermodel before the baby was born—and not be blamed for the systemic deterioration of the American family and the scourge of fatherless households. For Newton, it was yet another lens through which to view him, as if maturity, greed and race weren't enough. The son of a church bishop, the middle son of a tight-knit family, Newton had given them something they expected.

"I want it to be known that his mother and I are staunch Christian proponents of marriage and all things pertaining to legitimacy," Cecil says. "I have three sons and one woman, and I

have been a living example all his life of what a man should be in a family. Cam is 26 years old, not 18 or 19. He has a heightened consciousness of who he is as a man, and I always tell him the decisions you make you have to live with short- and long-term. I don't style it as a mistake; I style it as something that can be a gift for him and the young lady. We're going to support them in every aspect—physically, emotionally and spiritually."

Against Atlanta, after Chosen was born but before the world knew, Newton scored and incorporated a baby-rocking move into his celebration. After the loss, and after he had spent nearly an hour in silence at his locker, he was asked what the gesture meant. He dismissed the question with a wave of his hand and a shake of his head, making it clear it was a private message in a public moment.

The next week, after the season-ending win over the Bucs, which gave the Panthers the NFC's No. 1 seed, Newton walked into the interview room wearing a three-quarter-length sports coat, blue slacks, the swirly black-and-white shoes and no foxtail.

As the news conference wound down, Newton was asked what he will remember from the 2015 regular season. It was a softball—light and fluffy and lobbed over the heart of the plate.

Newton paused, and his smile vanished.

"We shouldn't have lost," he said, his voice trailing. "We shouldn't have lost."

That's it? After 15 wins and 35 touchdown passes and countless dances and all those unnamed Euro-step/jump shots, he will remember the loss? The *one* loss? It seems the NFL's resident big kid—has the NFL considered a Big Kid Laureate program?—would cite a particularly memorable dance move, or a little boy who was especially moved after being handed a ball after a touchdown, or an open-field juke that inflicted exceptional and long-lasting embarrassment on a linebacker.

But no. The one loss—not the NFL-best four game-winning drives, not the 14 straight wins to start the season, not the records, not the ascension to the illustrious pantheon of the most fetishized gods in sport. No. The loss. The mood in the room shifts. The interview is over, and as Cam Newton walks away from the podium, he leaves behind a lingering sense of that rarest of emotions: surprise. ■

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